

Editor's Foreword:

I just wanted to take a second to comment on the color pages for this volume (and the last ones from the previous volume). They were not originally included in the releases, so I did my best with the translation, but unfortunately it was a bit difficult. Some of them I couldn't find any higher resolutions for, so I couldn't properly make out some of the kanji. The translations are a mix of my limited knowledge of Japanese, Google translate, and the original lines from the text. At the very least I'm confident I put the pictures in places that made sense. Basically they're probably not very accurate, sorry about that. At least I tried right?

In any case, about the volume itself: like the second half of *Burning One Man Force*, this volume took more effort than the others. The translations were rough and had poor subject-verb agreement, stuff like that. It actually got better for the most part as it went on, so hopefully I won't have such a tough time with the next volume. As such I had to change around many things for this volume. Some things were omitted if I couldn't understand them; some things were added in order to improve the flow. Hopefully the overall picture is intact. If you want to check out the original translation you can find it here: <http://shutazen.livejournal.com>

Sorry if I made any mistakes. I did read through it twice, but I'm only human and it's easy to miss your own mistakes after all. Besides I barely had enough patience to get through it the second time. I need a proofreader... oh well =).

Enjoy!

~Moonfaerie24

Full Metal Panic!

Come Make My Day

By Shoji Gatoh



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Prologue

The morning sun was shining from a small window in the ceiling.

In an old car in the corner of a repair shop a girl was facing three notebook PCs.

Various extensive numerical values appeared on the bulky screen. She took it all in at the same time as she busily scrolled. She started to get irritated because she needed to keep switching back and forth between windows. In order to speed the process up she would have needed three screens. At that rate, she didn't know how many more days it would take to start her work.

Inside the repair shop, a miserable unit- the body frame of an Arm Slave- was being tuned as it hung isolated in the corner.

It had no arms or legs. Not even armor. On the miniscule excuse of a head there were no sensors, so the machine guns could not be loaded. Originally it was installed with a low temperature nuclear battery called a Palladium Reactor; now, it was hollow.

The screen continued to spit out information.

The girl greedily absorbed the information, tapping on the keyboard at the same time. Using a programming language called BAda, she pounded in the necessary instructions.

Nimbly, precisely.

Compared to the traditional computer language it was a highly efficient high-level language. 100 lines of commands in traditional language only took a few lines to convey.

As she pounded on the keys, inside of her head she was talking to someone.

Good Afternoon. You seem to be dead already.

You've already felt complete defeat. Everything ended, the lights turned off. You're thinking that you've been released from the battle. No, you're not thinking. Right now you are the same as dirt. As dirt you don't think of anything. As dirt you don't feel sadness.

However, that moment of darkness will end.

Everyone thinks that you are in ruins. But I don't think so.

The interface that you were called was destroyed, but right now, I am reconstructing that.

Your heart still remains.

As you run on the infinite circuit of the quantum beat, with those reassuring vestiges, I can feel it somewhere-

The angle of the sunlight from the ceiling window had changed.

There was not enough oxygen going to her brain. She took a deep breath, massaging her stiff shoulder.

Now her brain did not have enough sugar. She bit into the chocolate bar that was on her desk and drank up some cold milk coffee.

And then pounded on the keys once more.

One line, and another line. All the while getting close to "Him".

The morning sun changed to the setting sun, and she realized that her work was nearing completion. She turned to the woman who was reading in the corner of the repair shop.

"Electricity please."

The woman closed the book and got up.

A unit was installed to the side of the incomplete Arm slave- it was connected to an electronic machine the size of a refrigerator. From it hung a large lever on the corner of the wall.

The lights in the factory flickered, supplying electricity to the unit.

“Are you finished already?” the slim woman with black hair asked.

“Right now it’s in the middle of testing. It will take a little more time.”

“Is that so? If there’s something you want just say it.”

“Sure.”

The test would take half a day.

The girl adjusted the program, measuring the unit’s responses, and then made more adjustments. Getting tired, she silently bit into a club sandwich. After taking a nap she resumed her work.

The morning sun in the ceiling windows changed again into the setting sun.

Finally, she said, “It’s done.”

The last push- she hit the enter key.

There was a flickering on the screen when the unit connected. Letters started to appear in the window.

(e....e....)

The girl had not touched the keyboard. It was the output from the unit connect to the Notebook PC.

<e...es..escape...immediately. Repeat...recommend to abandon unit and escape immediately.>

She read the words on the screen as more appeared.

<Thanks, sergeant. Good luck.>

Only the engine and cooling system reverberated in the repair shop, enumerating the unrelated danger. Most probably, just before the unit had lost its functions, it had tried to display that information.

<.....>

The girl waited a moment. “He” already recognized a change and had started to sort out its current status.

<...Where do we come from?...what are we?...where are we going?>

What a strange question.

-Where do we come from, what are we...where are we going. Was this intricate information depending on something? Or was he dreaming?

The connection of the Notebook PC started to transmit the protocol. The connection was already complete. All the necessary tests had been performed before he had woken up.

There was a read-out in another window; a pseudo “Mental state” was displayed in a colorful 3-dimensional graph.

The red region on the graph turned yellow. The violent undulation of mountains and valleys became the flat shape of a basin. Coming from the mental state of a battle, it moved to a warning state of looking for the enemy.

It was probably because that he thought he was in the hands of the enemy.

She joined the fingers of both her hands, then lightly typed a salutation.

[--Hello AI. I’ve been looking for you.]

This guaranteed the silence of the Artificial Intelligence. There were no more signals transmitted.

Clever guy. He won’t talk so easily.

“We are allies, this is a safe place”, it would be difficult to establish that.

But an hour of patience continued, and then the artificial intelligence showed some reaction.

Three words of blunt reply.

<Report the situation.>

Behind the girl, the black haired woman watching over her shoulder let out a conservative smile.

“What’s the matter?” the girl asked.

“It’s the splitting image of its master,” she replied.

Chapter 1: Fallen Witch

The preliminary memo from the Sergeant of the City Police was still completely blank.

The psychiatrist, Martha Witt, was wearing glasses and directed her eyes to the documents again.

The Patient's name. The outward characteristics. Approximate age. Health condition. The circumstances during the care of the police.

They were in a hospital in the south of San Francisco. The patient sitting opposite of Dr. Martha, who was sitting at a desk, looked over with blank eyes.

The person was a girl in about her mid teens. Upon looking, you wouldn't know if she was in her 30's or 40's. The loose T-shirt she was wearing must have come from someone in the police. She had disordered ash-blonde hair not quite reaching her waist, and her jaw and cheeks were dirty with mud.

First the doctor addressed girl she was examining, telling her to answer all the questions clearly. Martha informed the girl of her own name and position, in the gentlest voice possible.

"What is your name?" Martha asked kindly.

"Teletha... Testarossa" the girl answered.

"What a wonderful name. Nice to meet you, Teletha. How old are you?"

"....17"

"What school do you go to?"

"...I don't attend school"

"Is that so? But looking at you, I'm sure all the boys find you sexy, right?"



The vacant eyes of a girl with chapped lips and waxen skin stared blankly at a point on the desk. "What's your name?" "Teletha... Testarossa."

The girl did not show any reaction. Being ashamed of her own appearance, she did not even see the sexual suggestion in the word “boys”.

“And then....about the situation of your care. You were walking barefoot by the freeway near Redwood, right? At three in the morning, alone”

“....yes”

“Is there something you don’t remember?”

“.....no”

The response was relatively clear.

But the problem was that her explanation was entirely different.

“Why were you there?”

“....because I was abandoned.”

“By who?”

“....I think my subordinates.”

“Subordinates?”

Martha carefully examined the appearance of Teletha Testarossa. Obviously she was telling some kind of joke.

“Umm.... you’re not attending school right? Those ‘subordinates’, who are you referring to?”

“....Mercenaries.”

“Mercenaries?”

“....Mercenaries of Mithril.”

“Mithril?”

“An informal military organization who aimed to keep terrorism and conflict in check. I was the commander of the *Tuatha de Danaan* squad of the West Pacific Fleet.”

Teletha stared at the top of the desk, looking as though what she had just said was not important.

“....My rank is Captain. I have succeeded in various difficult operations making use of an assault landing submarine, 3rd Generation Arm Slaves and the latest equipment.”

“Haha. I’m not really familiar with those, but it seems like an amazing unit.”

After saying that, Martha scribbled on the memo in her hand.

[Extremely rare kind of delusion. Using accurate expertise of terminology. Battle Group, Amphibians. Requires examination]

Since she was not familiar with military terminology, she changed her questions.

“You just said *Tuatha de Danaan* right? Is it from Celt mythology?”

“...yes. From the divine being Dana.”

“Being the commander, could you be the mother goddess?”

“....Dana is the name of the submarine’s AI. It is a complicated system that is extraordinarily large scale adopting quantum computing.”

“Is that so?”

Martha wrote in her Memo [From which sci-fi novel?] and then asked, “And then....you being the commander of that military organization, why were you walking in a place like that? You mentioned you were abandoned by your subordinates”

“....yes.”

Teletha kept silent for a moment.

The examination room was gloomy. The fluorescent lamp on the ceiling flickered, and the damp atmosphere of the night became heavy.

“....my base received heavy offensive from the enemy.”

“Enemy?”

“....an organization called Amalgam. After receiving their overwhelming attack, Mithril was annihilated. Together with my subordinates, I escaped from the base with the submarine, somehow able to survive...”

There was an unavoidable strong suffering in the girl’s eyes. She must have thought of a painful event. She wrapped her arms around her shoulders and trembled, shaking bit by bit.

“Are you alright? You don’t have to say what’s painful.”

“...no”

Teletha made a gulp, and let out a small sigh.

“....the submarine was made from the finest materials. Although it could run on the bottom of the ocean for a number of weeks, my ship was not in a condition to cruise. Of course we didn’t have the funds. And the salary to pay my subordinates.”

“.....”

“...for a submarine at sea, the crew can place you under a lot of stress. Half of my crew were starting to get discontented, and finally, they sold me and my ship to the enemy.

“Those subordinates?”

“....the one who planned the mutiny was executed.” Teletha said without any special importance.

“He was killed?”

“Yes.” the girl said with a weak voice.

With that she shut her mouth, and did not answer any more questions from Martha.



A week had passed since the first interview.

Two times every day, Martha interviewed the girl called Teletha Testarossa, hearing a little of the “details”. She didn’t have

the confidence of building doctor patient trust. Even then, Teletha was alone in the care of the police and spoke of her circumstances in fragments.

Apparently:

--The girl was a commissioned officer of an informal military organization, and handled the various anti-terrorism operations easily. That organization was attacked by the enemy, and her subordinates were isolated. She had been mutinied on by unsatisfied soldiers and had been unable to resupply. Then, the "Assault landing submarine" that she commanded got involved in a fatal accident and would not function.

Embarking from the ship to a helicopter, the girl escaped from the sinking ship by gripping a subordinate, that helicopter ran out of fuel on the California coast and was discarded in the open sea.

By the time the lifeboat reached the coast of Half Moon port, merely five subordinates remained.

At this point, the subordinates got angry at Teletha, who tried to give orders like a superior officer, and threw her off at the road side from a stolen car.

And then, while walking absentmindedly, a truck driver discovered her and placed her in the care of the police--

Those kinds of delusions had never been heard by Martha.

Mercenary unit, submarine, and a descent from a helicopter were exceedingly preposterous; at least her story was consistent from the time that she was taken in.

In all honesty, when she had read the initial reports, Martha had concluded that she was a victim of assault.

But that was not it.

From the clinical charts that she was handed in the emergency room it seemed there was absolutely no evidence that

the girl named Teletha Testarossa was raped or oppressed. What seemed like an external wound was just a small scratch that came from walking through a thicket somewhere.

There was no contradiction in the context, she used extremely accurate military terms. Even the “informal military organization”. Her words were by no means incoherent. Martha had an acquaintance that was a former navy officer, and called him to make confirmations.

“I don’t really know well. But a helicopter taking off a submarine?”

After asking, the officer laughed and denied it.

“No. long ago planes took off from a submarine. Now there’s none. It has to be a big ship to make up the space, firstly there is no practical use. Well, the girl must be daydreaming.”

“But she was saying something about a special ship. Assault....Loading submarine, or something like that.”

“Haha. That’s amazing.”

“Something they call the ‘Toy Box’ in the United States Navy...”

“....what did you say?”

Her friend, whose voice had been playful up until then because Martha hadn’t called in a while, suddenly became serious.

“‘Toy Box’. that’s what they called it.”

“Where did you hear that from?”

“From that patient. Do you know about it?”

“I... don’t know.”

“Huh?”

Not knowing what to do after hearing this, that friend said in a serious voice, “No. It was a rumor I heard from a friend who is still in active duty. There’s nothing more known after that.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Listen Martha. I don’t know the details but, I think it will be better if you drop the charges on that patient. Also her words, everything that she said, you did not hear. Get back to what you were talking about.”

“I don’t understand. Why the sudden-”

“Sorry, I have to work. I’ll call you again.”

“Wait-”

The former Navy friend hung up.

It was increasingly getting strange.

It was impossible that what the girl said was really a military secret. Just to make sure she searched the net using the keywords “Toy Box” and “submarine”, but nothing came up. Just a site created by Toy Mania introducing a new toy submarine.

The next day, Martha relayed the conversation she had had with her former Navy friend to Teletha.

“Well, isn’t that right....” the girl said with a frail voice.

“...an existing weapon system that the American Navy could not detect, it definitely cannot be officially announced. Among the soldiers, it should have only been rumors.”

Getting irritated, Martha asked, “If it’s important classified information, why did you tell an ordinary doctor like me?”

“Because the information is no longer significant.”

The girl laughed with a touch of snorting.

“This is the reality. I was an incompetent commander.

That’s why my subordinates deserted me, and I’m currently here. Losing everything, only living an existence without death.”

[.....]

“Doctor Witt. You think of me as a pitiful girl who has delusions right?”

“No, that’s-”

“It’s alright. Please leave it at that. Actually, I’m just a shell....”

Teletha slowly lied face down. Her disordered hair hung on her cheeks. The melancholic fluorescent lights made an abnormal shadow fall over her the features.

“It’s a delicate matter but,” waiting a little while, Martha opened her mouth. “You will be moved to a different institution. You will live with people who have the same problems.”

The girl couldn’t be kept in that hospital for long. A minor with no clear background, and no money, couldn’t get any social insurance. She had to be housed in a special institution on the outskirts of the city.

“....yes. Do as you like” Teletha said without showing unexpected behavior.

“How unfortunate.”

That was what Martha really felt in her heart.

No matter how absurd, her wild ideas had this persuasive charm of truthiness.

No matter how many times she heard from other patients that invaders from other planets or from the depths of the earth were among us, or that the government had planted a transmission device in their mind, Martha could not feel the logic behind such claims. Those stories were too unrealistic. But this patient, a minor, was able to logically explain the finer points of nuclear and amphibious warfare that were only known by specialists. She had never encountered anything like this girl before.

“The transfer is tomorrow evening. I will also be present at that time.”

“Yes” Teletha said with an indifferent voice.



The next day, the transfer vehicle arrived 5 minutes late at the hospital.

It was a black wagon. Rolling out a wheelchair, the driver and helper greeted Martha simply. They were unknown faces. But there was nothing strange in their ID or transfer documents.

Teletha, who was completely exhausted, rode in the wheelchair.

“She complained of a headache this morning, the doctor on duty instructed us to give this medicine to her” the nurse explained to Martha.

“Did she get violent?” asked the driver.

“No. She’s quite obedient.” Martha answered in place of the nurse. The driver nodded slightly.

“But, she was temporarily restrained. It was dangerous for her to walk.”

“Yes. But...”

“Don’t worry. It’s not like she will get violent. ...eh, and then? Did this girl say anything strange to you?”

“Strange? Strange you mean...that’s my line of work. It would be rare to have a patient that doesn’t say anything strange.”

Feeling uncomfortable with the curious question, Martha answered with an insincere smile.

“Haha. That’s right” the driver said looking around.

Martha and the nurse were at the side entrance of the hospital, near the roadway. No one else but the driver and the helper were around.

“Doctor...”

“What is it?”

“Perhaps there is some possibility... that the girl said something about Amalgam or Mithril?”

“What was that?” Martha asked in return. Her shoulders and back could not stop shaking uneasily.

“Looks like you know”

The Driver smiled complacently.

At a glance he was an ordinary Caucasian in his 30's. He wore navy blue pants and a navy blue shirt. Height, around 180 cm, short framed hair, and a small scar.

Right then the man's features had completely changed. In the eyes of Martha, it was like having a sullen look of coercion.

“Oops. Don't say strange things.”

The driver seized firmly and Martha's hand was held tightly behind her back. With only that, her bones snapped and became two equal parts in the incredible grip.

The man, with his open right hand, took out a hidden automatic pistol hidden from under his shirt.

That's right, it was a pistol. Martha had not touched this type of pistol before, but even then the man showed his gun and said something to her. It was easy to comprehend.

“Do you understand, Doctor?”

“....yes”

“Don't cause trouble, slowly get on the car. The nurse too.”

The nurse, who is still in shock, saw the man's pistol and gulped.

“We can't just leave this lady over here now can we? Come on, get in.”

“Wait, she has nothing to do with this. I don't know who you people are but-”

“Just get in.”

The man pressed hard, and Martha and the nurse rode in the back seat of the delivery wagon. The helper, who also held a gun,

got in the back. He was in a position where he could easily control Teletha and Martha.

The door closed, and the car started to run. After three road lines, they could see a patrol car stopped in front of a coffee shop. But if she thought of getting violent and calling for help, Martha's head would have been blown off.

"Don't be frightened. There are still things we want to ask you. Right, Bill?"

The helper said with a very relaxed voice, the driver replied shortly.

"Yeah. We won't put you in danger."

You're lying. You intend to kill us. Because, why didn't you put on a mask? Why did you calmly expose your face? Why did you calmly call your partner's name?

The pale face of the nurse sunk into silence. Martha wanted to encourage her, but didn't have the composure.

The car shortly reached San Bruno, heading from the city to the harbor. On their way home early, there were a number of private cars and trucks flowing past them one by one in the opposite lane.

They could only have been headed to an old warehouse nearby. There was only a small container and a two blackened sedans. There was no cargo, it was deserted.

From a small window in the setting sun, the dust filled atmosphere reflected a number of bright lines.

"Get out."

Martha and the nurse timidly got out of the car after it stopped inside the abandoned warehouse.

Waiting in front of the car were five more men. The leader must have been the one wearing the brown suit. The other four

were dressed up in rough work clothes, with automatic guns hanging from their shoulders.

“You’re five minutes late.” the man in the suit said, looking at the watch in his left hand with refinement.

He was still young. Around his thirties. Slim, with cleanly combed black hair. He was like a being drawn from a brush, an impressive beautiful youth with graceful eyes and brows.

“Were sorry, Mister. We didn’t want to get caught speeding-” the driver said with a restrained voice.

“Stop saying nonsense. And then? Did you bring her?” the man in the suit asked.

“This way.”

The helper lowered the wheelchair from the wagon, bringing Teletha Testarossa in front of them. The drugs were wearing off, and Teletha opened her eyes.

But, that was all.

Being indifferent to her surroundings, she only looked absentmindedly in her front.

“Miss Testarossa?”

The man in the suit kneeled by the wheelchair, peering into the girl’s face.

“I am Lee Fowler. I serve your brother. Once, we met at your parent’s grave. ...then, I was inside an AS.”

“.....”

“When we heard of what happened to you, we came to pick you up. After this, what would you....”

Even after he said that Teletha still didn’t make any responses. The young man named Fowler stood up and sighed.

“Just a shell. Being the Witch of Mithril you are making us use a harsh hand.”

“I don’t see it that way.”

“But that is withering away. It is much more difficult to magnificently fall in the middle of battle. The legend is over. The problems in communication and personnel relations lost their teeth in such worthless reasons, disappearing miserably is the hero of reality.”

Fowler wearily fell silent, and continued to walk in front of Martha.

“Forgive me, Doctor. Were you treated violently?”

“No....”

“What did this girl tell you, there is a need to confirm. Please allow me two to three questions.”

The fear of course did not disappear. Martha, towards those silent black eyes, had a feeling like she was being sucked in.

“Amalgam and Mithril, the name of such organizations, did you hear of them making use of such weapons and units?”

“....yes.”

“Did she bring up any definite names or places?”

“....no.”

“You’re not lying right?”

“O..of course.”

“Aside from your Navy friend, did you mention to anyone else what this girl had said?”

How did you know that I consulted with a friend? Did you intercept it? Are you a real pro, a real classified organization’s spy?

Martha was surprised; her remaining doubt had been smashed and disappeared. She felt it clearly. This was not some sort of elaborate joke brought about by someone- that is what her heart had been wishing for. For this man to suddenly say “Happy Birthday, Martha!” and, with laughing friends, take out armfuls of

tables and food and alcohol and cake. She had silently held on to this type of expectation.

But it was not so. At any rate, her birthday had been last month.

“She didn’t say anything. It’s the truth.”

Fowler observed her eyes closely. She felt as though she were receiving the treatment of a patient.

“I believe you.”

Fowler smiled at first.

“But, regrettable words have to be said to you. As much as possible we would like to keep our privacy. What happened today and about her should be protected... from the public. Do you understand?”

“I understand. I swear I won’t tell anyone. So let me go back home.”

“I would also want that if I could. But, no matter how strong the determination of man, there is a way for current medical science to extract the needed information. Those are the ‘regrettable words’. I’m really sorry.”

She got goose bumps, and her shoulders and feet were sweating and shaking.

I don’t want to die.

I don’t want to be killed.

“Do you understand why I am explaining this to you?”

“Don’t kill me.”

“I’m also afraid of death. But, the worst of that is that you would die not knowing the reason. That is why I am explaining this to you. With important words, the fear of your opponent is not fun.”

In Fowler’s well-regarded features, a deep emotion of sorrow and compassion surfaced.

“Please don’t kill me.”

“It is really unfortunate.”

“Please I beg you....”

“This is goodbye, Doctor.”

Fowler stepped back. The subordinates took one step forward. Tears were in her eyes. In the corner of her field of vision was the profile of the nurse, who was completely silent. Her face had become pale, but she was very quiet, and not even shaking. What bravery. Or was it simply stupidity? Did she not realize her own fate?

The nurse was still young. Around her mid twenties. An oriental. A very short hair, with eyes and brows like that of a fishing cat.

That nurse let out a sigh, and murmured in a passive voice, “Oh well. What an extreme drama this played out to be.”

The voice mixed in with a snort.

“Just when we thought that we caught the tail.again, another conceited bastard showed up.”

“Ah, you- stop-” Martha tried to warn her.

Wasn’t it strange? But Martha’s thin voice was ignored by the nurse, who said, “Isn’t that right? Tessa!?”

The eyes of Teletha Testarossa, who had been like a disabled person sitting in a chair, suddenly focused- returning with the light of consciousness. Even her face, that had looked worn out, revived with vitality and intelligence. It was like a doll coming to life.

“I’m sorry Melissa. The one who was playing a drama was me.”

After muttering that, Teletha laboriously stood up from the wheelchair.

The armed men in the area were disturbed by the sudden change in the girl. She carelessly extended her hands out and brushed back her hair. The girl then headed toward Fowler to greet him.

“Good afternoon, Fowler-san. I really intended to introduce myself but, dealing with the doctor here, this has happened.”

“I see. You were after me.”

As expected of a commander, he was frankly not surprised.

But Fowler’s facial expression was by no means relaxed. The extent of Teletha’s trap here, this place becoming a fighting scene, the chances of them winning, he carefully calculated many elements inside his head.

“Then please tell your men to drop their weapons. Or else they will be given a severe lesson.”

Then the subordinate who had been holding Martha, the driver, gave a short curse and headed for Teletha.

“Lesson? Enough with the jokes, little girl!”

“Don’t...”

Immediately after saying the short word, Fowler narrowed his eyes-

The driver, who had his hand extended to the nape of Teletha’s neck, fell down on the floor with a bullet. He had been shot in the back. With a loud thud, fresh blood scattered onto the floor.

“Ga...”

The sound of the gunshot came from a rifle far away. A snipe from an extreme distance. And it had come through the small opening of the warehouse door-

“Great job, right in the middle.” the nurse called Melissa said into an extremely compact wireless radio in her ear. “If they make any strange moves take a shot immediately!”

“...Yeah yeah. Uruz 6, Roger!”

From the receiver of the wireless radio, Martha also heard the reply of a man mixed with the noise. Nearby, Teletha warned them again.

“Do you understand? Please disarm.”

“Ha....wonderful.”

Even though his subordinates could be shot to death, Fowler maintained a smile from his heart.

“Really wonderful. A large intelligence analysis. Shadow and interception. After surrendering to the guards you slipped through everything, and made it up to here. You even did a wonderful acting job in front of me. Moreover it was a daring move, capturing me alive? You are his sister after all. The legend still continues....!”

“That is a terrible misunderstanding. Not even once do I remember raising the white flag to you.” Teletha said with a dreadful smile.

In those eyes burned the silent anger of revenge, releasing a blazing and violent light. It was unexpected. Such strong life force was expressed from that small, sweet, and delicate body. It was the first time that Martha had experienced it.

“That’s how it is. That is why, you are still naive-!”

Fowler’s right hand indistinctly moved. Folding the palm of his hand, he pushed a small switch. In that instant, explosions occurred all over the warehouse.

“.....”

A flash followed. They were deafened by the sounds of the explosion, and black smoke spread all around. Although it was not lethal, the bomb aimed to deceive the eyes.

“Huh....?”

Understanding what was about to happen, Teletha immediately rushed over to Martha, who was still standing still, and pushed her down for cover.

“No....!”

“Don’t worry. My subordinates will do something.”

Martha looked over at the nurse named Melissa. With lightning speed she had taken down a nearby man. Martha couldn’t even see how he had been taken down. Then, the man who had been next to him was shot with deadly accuracy.

Gunshots. Screams. Curses.

The automatic guns of the men resounded. Being attacked by an unseen sniper, the men fell down one by one.

Fowler tried to leave, and fired at Melissa, but Melissa flew sideways, evading the enemy shot, and hid in the shadows of the abandoned car.

Apparently the nurse and the sniper were not Teletha’s only companions. There were more explosions all around as a number of men wearing bulletproof vests on top of civilian clothing rushed into the warehouse.

“Give it up, you delicate man” Melissa shouted.

“Give up?” Fowler replied from behind the sedan. “The feeling is mutual; there are still some trump cards left. Don’t restrain yourself from trying to put an end to this.”

Together with his declaration-

The ceiling of the warehouse was torn to pieces, where a single giant appeared.

There was a fierce thundering roar. Dust and smoke swirled about and the fragments of the building materials were scattered about to one side. Martha, witnessing the events in bewilderment, was still being covered by Teletha who was supposed to be the patient.



“.....”

When she looked up she saw that the ashen grey giant was kneeling down. It had acutely streamlined armor and extending from the head was a long, hair-like radiation cord.

It was an Arm Slave.

A humanoid weapon of the Military. At least she knew the name of that weapon. A living infantry could in no way go up against that powerful humanoid weapon. Even just from watching the news on CNN she could tell that this was by no means just the silhouette of a robot. It was much smarter, and seemed to have fierce reflexes and power.

Fowler did not even have the appearance of triumph. He got down into the rear of the AS. Melissa and the reinforcements hid in the shadows without pursuing, allowing him to escape.

“I thought so” Teletha muttered.

She now allowed a smile. This time, with a self derided sensation, it was not a halfhearted smile.

“Wha, what is the meaning of this....?”

“Don’t move” Teletha whispered to Martha, raising her voice.

“It’s like this, Uruz 1. Please annihilate the enemy AS!”

“Roger, Captain!”

A voice resounded from a speaker somewhere.

The sound of the roof being torn away resounded around them. A new black AS broke through the walls of the warehouse. Without a moment of hesitation it charged to the ashen grey AS.



Distorted metal frames. Broken concrete. Smashed pieces of glass from the skylight.

The materials from the warehouse were dancing around the surroundings of the black unit. Belfangan Clouseau's AS, Falke, cancelled its electronic camouflage, tackling the enemy unit with full force.

First there was a need for Tessa and the others to clear the area.

The engagement of the two units broke through the walls of the warehouse, plunging into the countless containers on the pier. Even then, the enemy unit did not fall.

Clouseau swung the monomolecular cutter in his hand towards the chest of the enemy.

For an accurate surprise attack, it was a good strike that passed the mark. But the enemy unit expected that.

There was a change on the graphical heat distribution display.

The enemy unit's arm transformed, turning from yellow to orange to red.

“!”

<Incoming.>

Clouseau already saw the gravitational field created by the enemy unit coming.

There was a distorted atmosphere around the enemy's right arm.

The shockwave of the strike barely passed him by. Around ten containers behind him were blown off the pier, like papers dancing in the air.

The enemy unit started to trip. The enemy unit staggered.

The Falke stepped in front, rushing to make the final blow. Another warning. The enemy unit's Lambda Driver started attacking with the raging waves of a gravitational field. Clouseau somehow saw through it, and barely leapt to avoid it.

He revolved in mid air on top of the enemy and slammed down his anti tank dagger. In tandem with the plastic explosives he sharply dove towards the neck of the enemy.

There was an explosion. The shape of the enemy disappeared in the middle of the flames and smoke.

Clouseau did not even consider that the enemy had been defeated so easily.

When the Falke landed he immediately flew sideways in a battle maneuver. In a battle of 3rd generation AS, which could reach the limits of three dimensional maneuvering, the moment of landing could be said to be the most vulnerable. There was no room for a breather.

Sure enough, the ashen grey enemy unit broke through the whirlpool of smoke like an arrow, pressing immediately towards him.

The enemy, which was a Codarl type, was equipped with a Lambda Driver. Ordinary attacks would have no effect on it. With the difference in equipment, there was an overwhelming disadvantage.

However, even then-

“Let’s do it” Clouseau muttered in the middle of the fierce crash.

Surely the enemy unit’s power was tremendous. The difference was definitely absolute.

However, what about the skills of the pilot? If the enemy unit had not been equipped with a Lambda Driver, with a battle this long, they would have at least died three times already.

If it was about skills, Clouseau was absolutely superior....!

Clouseau had that confidence. Even though the enemy was not an amateur, his unconscious overconfidence could be seen

everywhere. The enemy relied on his own dominance, and the arrogance in his straight movement was already evidence enough.

It would definitely go into place.

There was the sound of alarm. The enemy suddenly drew closer.

He had the strong impulse to pull the trigger on his head cannons, but he thought it was too early and controlled his reflexes. Using the information from the “fairy eyes” installed in his unit he was able to evade the shockwave from the enemy. Clouseau then called out over his wireless radio.

“Uruz 1 to HQ! Has it been delivered yet!?”

“This is HQ. The launch was already completed.” Replied a man with a gloomy and honest voice. It was Richard Mardukas. “Currently, the TLAM is in the middle of inertia guidance. ETA would be 30 seconds. We entrust the terminal guidance to Uruz 1”

“Uruz 1 roger!”

At the same time, his AI reported.

<Warning message. Code from HQ confirmed. Taking over terminal guidance of TLAM01. 20 seconds until impact.>

“Arm the warhead of TLAM01”

<Roger. TLAM01 warhead armed.>

The weapon data on the display at the corner with the blue letters [SAFE] suddenly changed to the red letters [ARM].

The warhead was armed.

The smart warhead of a cruise missile from somewhere in the sky.

Clouseau’s unit continued to evade, and the Codarl closed in. The light from the setting sun poured over them as it stepped over the mountains of containers. The extending long hair-like heat radiating cord from its head glared in a rainbow of colored brilliance.

“Well, come on....!”

He released an anti AS hand grenade.

The Codarl lightly stepped to the left, enduring the explosion. Behind the enemy unit a large container danced from the sky, spinning around.

The machine gun on the Falke’s head fired.

The Codarl repelled the small rain of bullets with the Lambda Driver. When he judged that there was no more threat to his own armor, the gravitational field disappeared. He then began to focus the power in an attack towards Clouseau.

All in accordance with their plan.

As far as the bullets from the Falke’s machine gun were concerned, the first 50 shots in the magazine were ordinary bullets. From there on, the 51st shot was loaded with acrylic paint bullets.

Those paint bullets rained down on the Codarl’s head. The spraying red paint clung to the enemy unit’s external sensors.

It was a simple tactic to block his vision. In previous model ASes high frequency wiper and cleaning nozzles were equipped. A counter-measure for mud and dirt. Even if it was acrylic paint, it would only take a few seconds to recover its field of vision.

But, they were banking of those few seconds.

In that brief window the enemy unit could not search for its opponent using its Milli-wave radar.

<TLAM01, impact in 10 seconds.>

The unit’s AI informed Clouseau. The surrounding atmosphere shook.

From above, the sounds of a jet engine roared. From the west skies, from the shining light of the twilight sun, something cylindrical was coming towards them.

<Five.....four.....three.....>

From the head of the Falke a terminal guidance laser illuminated, and on the chest of the Codarl shined a small red dot.

<Impact>

The fierce explosion from the skies attacked the enemy unit.

The cruise missile flew over with the speed of sound, to the position of the laser- there was an explosion in the shaped charge. Gas formed that was denser than steel, and in an instant the point on the enemy's armor flared in flames.

The shockwave of the explosion shook the Falke.

“!”

Clouseau rose with skill, bracing himself. He spurred into the enemy unit in no time. In the smoke of the explosion, the Codarl still lived. He had expanded the protective wall of the Lambda Driver in no time.

But...!

Immediately following the violent attack the enemy's unit staggered. The Falke's “fairy eyes” accurately caught sight of the expanding condition of the enemy's Lambda Driver. Anticipating the final blow, the enemy's barrier expanded.

However, it was only in the front.

Clouseau slipped through to the right of the enemy and, in an agile movement with the monomolecular cutter, cut at the right abdomen. This was the where the report from the technical officer had theorized the module for the Lambda Driver was located.

A tough spot to get to.

The Codarl turned around and initiated its gravitational field, but it just flickered a few times then disappeared. The Lambda Driver of the enemy was powerless.

The unexpected damaged disturbed the enemy unit and it simply stood in shock. The ironclad regulation regarding 3rd generation AS battle was to move agilely and mercilessly-

Clouseau threw his last anti tank dagger towards the enemy unit. The dagger hit the chest of the Codarl and exploded. That time, the upper half of the enemy unit was in pieces.

The torn off arm rotated, drawing a strange arch in the dusk of the harbor.

Turning from the scattered fragments of the enemy unit, Clouseau immediately activated the enemy search mode. Scanning with the anti ECS sensor, he was preparing for a new enemy to appear.

No response.

“fu-....”

This was the first time gaining that kind of certainty, and he sighed a breath of relief. It seemed that the enemy had only prepared one unit.

In order to support the operation conducted with Tessa as bait, his unit had been on standby. In addition, standing by in the bay of San Francisco was the submarine *Tuatha de Danaan*. It had been ready to fire cruise missiles. Also, they had prepared the paint bullets for the machine gun in his unit’s head.

In the worst case scenario, the enemy would have also prepared an AS, and the possibility that it would be equipped with a Lambda Driver had not discarded.

It was better to be prepared after all. Thinking like that, Clouseau called over his wireless radio.

“Uruz 1 to all units. The Codarl type enemy AS is destroyed.”



After the confrontation of the two units, Falke and Codarl, the aftermath of the battle could be seen all round the area encompassing the warehouse.

The warehouse had been half destroyed, the parked car had been trampled, and a number of enemy corpses were rolled in. On top of the mountain of rubble the fire was already contained and only the dense white smoke hung overhead.

“Tessa. Ben defeated the enemy unit.” The nurse, Melissa Mao, said to Tessa. Enemy’s machine gun in hand, she had heard the news over the wireless radio. “There don’t seem to be any more enemy units around. It was a one on one with the M9, it’s the first time that we defeated a Codarl. It’s impressive.”

“Yes.” Tessa Testarossa replied shortly, still covering the psychiatrist Martha Witt.

Without pardon, they made a thorough search of the destroyed warehouse. The PRT, without letting their guard off, continued to observe the controlled area, and then ascertained that there were no injuries.

Tessa cut the button at the back of her worn patient’s over suit and it fell from her small shoulders. Quickly checking her body she assessed that there were only minor injuries. No problem.

“The target got away, right?”

Tessa glanced sideways; she was looking for Lee Fowler, knowing that it would be useless.

“We lost sight of him when the ceiling collapsed. We’re sorry” Mao said.

Tessa shook her hands lightly.

“It’s alright. It was a greeting operation anyway. In the point of involving civilians, we half failed.

“The female doctor over there, I’ve thought of getting her far away.... I didn’t think this through enough after all. Oh well.”

Mao shrugged her shoulders and returned silently to the secured area of the warehouse. There was an out of place electronic sound.

It was a high pitched monotonous alarm.

Tessa walked over, barefooted, towards the sound. From the scattered concrete on the ground, there was a black mobile phone.

She picked up the phone, and pressed the answer button.

“Fowler-san right?” Tessa said, with a laugh from the phone.

“Yes, I would have wanted to talk to you a little more. But I have no obligation to be obediently captured. That is why I left this phone.”

Then Fowler had immediately escaped from the area, most probably from a vehicle that had been prepared beforehand, heading somewhere to the town area. Since he already knew about the counter-measures for phone traces there was no possibility of pursuit.

“Fist please let me tell you that it was excellent. Eliminating more than 10 of my subordinates, even destroying an AS. That was your minimum fire power, right? It was my complete defeat.”

“I wonder about that. Right now you are still free.”

“You are quite right.”

“Originally, because we had all the information leading to you, we were hoping to be able to restrain you. Now, even if you were to use that sweet fake smile of yours it wouldn’t stop us from making you rest in peace.”

“What frightening words from such a sweet voice.”

Tessa could easily imagine the faint smile on his face.

“But I do not understand. Are you seriously, going to continue to fight us like this?”

“We didn’t formally say that, right? It was just on our whim that we threw that play.”

“You should already know our strength. Right now Mithril does not exist. And the goal of Amalgam is not to overthrow the world. Rather to add moderate fuel to the state of tension in the world. You no longer have any reason to fight, right?”

“You’re really naive aren’t you?”

Tessa, putting on a face of modest disdain, laughed at him.

“Naive?”

“Yes. Did you think that we had planned to fight you with only great cause and sense of justice?”

“It seems like that is not so.”

“You have killed a lot of our comrades. That motive would be enough.” Tessa stated plainly.

In practicality, that was not the only reason she and her subordinates continue to fight, it was true that there was something that they had to do but-

Taken to its logical conclusion, that would be it.

Teletha Testarossa recognized that her subordinates were killed by Amalgam; that would be for eternity.

“That would also be the same here.” Fowler said coldly.

“You and your subordinates do not have strong bonds, right? We also suffered sufficient injury. On top of that, I swallowed everything and continued to be courteous toward you. Even then, that’s how you pay us back? I would want to hear your reason for that.”

“I understand your meaning at last.” Tessa said. “With overwhelming power, you extend your hand, saving the weak enemy right? We used to be the ones who thought like that. But

right now it's different. You said that you wanted to 'add fuel', and you play with the lives of many people. We cannot forgive that kind of arrogance."

"I see. Would it be alright if I interpret that as a form of opposition?"

Fowler's tease was plainly sharp.

"...Fowler-san. In this case can I tell you clearly?"

"Please?"

Tessa emphasizing word for word carefully, announced.

"Let me put it bluntly-I hate to death FUCKING pieces of SHIT people like you who pretend to be nice. Do you understand that?"



“.....”

Mao and the other members of the PRT who heard the conversation gapped with their eyes round hearing Tessa use the harsh 4 letter words.

“That is all, Message Boy. Please tell the same thing to Leonard Testarossa.”

Before Fowler could say anything, Tessa cut off the mobile phone, throwing it away casually on the ground.

“Let’s withdraw. Before the local police arrive get the LZ of the Pave Mare..., what’s wrong everyone?”

The dumbfounded Mao and the others glanced at each other, and finally let out a laugh. They felt light from the bottom of their hearts.

“Oh dear, nothing.”

““Fucking pieces of Shit’ huh?”

“Indeed, you’ve really got the balls.”

Mao tapped on the shoulders of a dubious faced Tessa.

“Eh? ah....”

“I already said it before. I love you, my commander.”

Flying into rage, she was not able to say anything. Mao gave an intense kiss to Tessa’s completely red cheeks.

“A..anyway, let’s withdraw! The local police will be coming here shortly. This is no time for sexual harassment!”

Shaking off Mao’s arm, Tessa gave instructions.

“Yeah yeah, Roger.but Tessa. What about that Doctor?”

Mao glanced at Doctor Martha Witt who was beside the iron pole of the warehouse. She had gazed dumbfounded at the exchange.

“Yes....”

Tessa, with a sad face, went over to the frightened Martha.

“I’m sorry for having involved you in such a dangerous situation, Doctor Witt” she said in a gentle voice.

“W..what do you intend to do with me?”

“Of course we have no intention of harming you. Anyway let’s get away from here.”

Tessa and the others immediately withdrew from the place of battle, moving a few kilometers by car to the city park.

Clouseau’s AS activated the invisibility mode of its ECS; and, avoiding any obstacles, he followed their car, leaping from building to building and road to road.

On the route, Tessa explained to Martha.

“When Fowler threatened to kill you, in actuality, rather he was threatening me.”

Until they were cleverly lured out this time, the enemy was also wary. Fowler happened to probe Martha, making a speech like that in front of Tessa. Even with Tessa’s own acting, there were still doubts inside her heart.

In fact, Amalgam and Mithril, with simple words and information attached to them, were no longer subjects that would be bothered by leakage. Some government and military officials had already gotten hold of all information of interest regarding those organizations.

The degree of knowledge in Jindai High School in Tokyo was also the same.

After the incident where the Merida base had been attacked, at the time when Tessa’s escaped ship was having resupply problems, the information had already been gathered. Within that information, the fate of transport helicopter and the Arbalest dispatched to Tokyo, and also what happened to Sagara Sousuke and Chidori Kaname was included.

What they understood was-

The transport helicopter Gebo 9 was attacked on the verge of landing. The pilot, Lt. Santos, and the rest of the crew were all killed.

The Arbalest unfolded a fierce battle with Amalgam's detachment in that school, and at its end there was serious damage. The ruins of the unit were recovered by the Japanese police, and it was immediately taken away by someone.

Chidori Kaname was missing after the battle, her whereabouts were unknown. Most probably, she was kidnapped by Amalgam.

And then Sagara Sousuke-

A few days after the Arbalest was damaged in battle, unexpectedly he had appeared in that school. He met with the students of 2nd year class 4- no, right now they were already 3rd year class 4- and explained the reason why Kaname disappeared. Then he left that place with only the words "I'll definitely get her back" remaining.

After this, the information was intercepted by all kinds of intelligence agencies.

There was more important information. The whereabouts of the *Tuatha de Danaan*, the maintenance equipments, and the remaining supplies. In other words, their remaining fighting capabilities. And then Tessa set out to capture information that would lead to Amalgam.

Martha, going along with this, did not know anything important. If she were to tell the Police, FBI, CIA or NSA about what Tessa had told her they would deny the value of such information.

"That's why-"

Tessa explained to her in the car that the information that Martha knew was not important.

“Fowler said that in order to test me. In the end, it was to make sure.”

“I really don’t understand, Teletha.”

“Didn’t you examine that there was nothing wrong with me. If I continued that acting, he might really have killed you. That’s why, I stopped acting then and there. In other words-”

“In other words? In other words, what?” Martha asked with an annoyed voice, exhausted with the succession of events.

“You have no information that has value. You will go back to your former way of life. You will not involve yourself with us again, right?”

“That’s right. It’s wonderful isn’t it?”

“I’m sorry Doctor. We were manipulating you. In our initial plan, we expected to put in a more unconcerned doctor for practicality.”

“I see. Because I was a person who jumps in, right? Because of my enthusiasm for work, I was targeted by assassins, I was shut up beautifully by a patient I thought pitiful!”

The woman, who was crying half hysterically, just stared at the calm expression of Tessa.

“We apologize for that. But, that was quite a performance right?”

“Well, that might be.”

The car reached the park.

The streets, with the setting dusk, shimmered in various colors, like a crafted crystal.

With a suggestion from Tessa, she got off. There were still a number of people strolling. Being mindful of that, Tessa’s subordinates got out of the car with small arms in hand. With the sound of the Rotor echoing above, the flowers in the garden swayed from the strong wind.

The unseen helicopter began to land in the park.

Within a few minutes, Teletha Testarossa and her companions vanished from the streets.

With strong winds pushing at her wavy hair, Martha's voice reached out to Tessa.

"Can I ask you one last question?"

"That depends on the subject. But go ahead."

"Didn't you.... feel anything? When you were delivered to the emergency room, taking the humiliating medical examination. Even after coming to me, you didn't even receive any service treatment. Why did you endure that?"

"A lot of friends died" Tessa said calmly. "Compared to that, it was nothing right?"

"Do you plan to take revenge?"

"I wonder about that..."

"Then, why go that far?"

"I too don't know very well" Tessa sweetly smiled. "Why is it that from the bottom of my heart an intense fighting spirit is gushing out? Why is this body burning up? Is it because I was thinking of retaliating? To know more about that, I would like you to lend your strength, but unfortunately we don't have time."

In the open vicinity of the park the invisible transport helicopter landed.

There was a fierce downward current. The leaves of countless trees and young flowers surrounding Tessa were dancing in a swirl.

In the illumination of the park, the girl's shimmering silver hair swayed beautifully in the wind. Behind her the landed helicopter cancelled its ECS, and she saw the swelled up shape of the pallid phosphorescence.

“Hey, Tessa!” Kurz Weber called from the opened cargo hatch on the foot.

“Yes, let’s go. Goodbye, Doctor.”

Only saying that, Teletha Testarossa walked to the transport helicopter, disappearing inside the cargo bay. Martha Witt stood still looking over at them. She said nothing.

The men boarded behind Tessa and the helicopter closed the hatch and started to take off.

Before rising above the tallest tree in the park, it activated its ECS again. Its shape vanished. The unit melted into the velvet night where eyes could no longer perceive them.



The dining room captured the Neo Gothic design, bringing about the simple modernistic illumination on the skillful design. The window facing southeast took in the fresh sunlight, with the furniture using various colors; it was the perfect place to relax for the one who had arrived there.

Getting a phone call from Lee Fowler, Leonard Testarossa entered the dining room. Still finishing the miscellaneous matters and negotiations from Easter Europe, he had only just returned from a long trip.

“We got busted by your sister.”

Fowler spoke from the phone.

It was already evening in San Francisco, but that place was at a latitude where the burning golden eastern sun still shone, illuminating the room.

“Was it her true character?” Leonard asked.

“Yes. Their goal was to capture me. They even managed to destroy a Codarl M.”

“Really....”

Putting the phone receiver to his ear, he sighed.

“My apologies, Lord Leonard.”

“No, I don’t blame you. That girl just doesn’t know when to give up”

That was his clever sister. But for how long? She spent too much time with Mithril, and only chose the foolish choices.

It was like, she was scorning those men- the death of her father and friends- drunk with self pity in a humorous anachronism, different from the vulgar and inferior “men of the seas”.

“There is another way. I have prepared several options-”

“No, you should stop. There are a mountain of things that I need your help with, Lee”

“Thank you very much.”

“First, get back here. The matter with my sister, you should leave it as it is for the time being.”

“Will that be alright?”

“We’ll deal with them at any rate. In order to preach nonsense to me, how many lives of tens or hundreds of men were paid?”

“Yes. I will put my resolve into it.”

“That’s right” listening to Fowler, he smiled.

“There was a message from your sister.”

“Hee. What did she say?” Leonard asked.

“It’s somewhat a bit of vulgar speech.”

“It’s alright, say it.”

“Okay.”

Fowlers voice was a little tensed. It was not because he was frightened of telling Leonard the message; it was some sort of humiliation that was cramping on his throat-

“Lady Teletha told me ‘I hate to death FUCKING pieces of SHIT people like you who pretend to be nice.’ And told me to tell you the same thing.”

Goodness gracious, here it came.

Wasn’t that like a sibling rivalry of an inferior blue-collar family? It was like she had been badly influenced by her association with her friends.

“Quite the authority.”

“My sincerest apologies.”

“No, it’s a good thing that she is energetic. Then, I leave the rest to you.”

Leonard cut off the phone and looked around the dining room. On the long table, about five meters away, there were candlesticks and tableware prepared. Dinner had not yet been served.

In the service entrance, from the partly open door, there was the presence of someone. There was someone working in the kitchen.

There was no mistake that it was company-

Concerning that point, he might not be different from his sister. Shrugging his shoulder lightly, he headed to the door and went to the kitchen, informing the girl inside, “I’m back”

The girl turned the frying pan on the giant stove. Chidori Kaname stopped cooking and took a glance at him.

“Welcome back” she answered feebly before returning to cooking.

“The cook will be worried; he won’t like you making dinner on your own.”

“Is that so?”

Kaname shook the frying pan, getting the pepper grinder from her side.

“Do you know what I’m making?”

“Dunno?”

“Omelette rice. But there is no Thai rice here. Not even a Japanese Tomato Ketchup. I tried lots of things, but I can’t seem to make the omelette rice that I know.”

“That’s unfortunate.”

“Can you ask someone to buy it? I’m sure any supermarket in Tokyo would have it” she complained feebly with spiteful sarcasm.

“I’ve forgotten” Leonard said, sitting down on the chair nearby.

“The flavor of omelette rice?”

“I also forgot the lamb roast that I ate in the past. Even the face of my mother who made it”

“.....”

“Well, that’s just the way it is.”

“As far as ever loving you goes, it’s the same for me.”

“You shouldn’t go that far” Leonard smiled, snorting. “No matter what you cannot oppose fate. If you accept it, it would come as a relief. That’s all you have to do.”

Kaname’s eyes, calm like a lake, looked at him. She felt nothing, like the sensor of a machine, accepting Leonard’s obviousness.

“Do you really think that?” she muttered, returning to working with the frying pan.

He stared at Kaname’s back. She was wearing a silk shirt and a pleated skirt.

While staring from the nape of her neck down the beautiful curve of her back he thought on her words.

Did he really think like that-

Of course he did.



He got up and approached her with the thought of embracing her from behind. Would she resist?

But, there was no meaning in that.

Leonard shrugged his shoulders and stood up, leaving the kitchen.

“However-” she suddenly muttered. “The real Omelette rice that I make is really delicious. It is unfortunate that you were not able to eat it.”

“Yeah.”

Lightly turning aside, Leonard headed back from the kitchen.

From there on, there was an unspeakable discomfort. He was slightly irritated when he noticed that the discomfort reminded him of the feeling from the courtyard at that school.

Outside of the corridor, facing the courtyard of the house through the dining room, a woman in a suit was waiting for him. It was one of his subordinates, Sabina Refunio, with Laptop in hand. It seemed like she had just finished with a communication.

“He is alive” Sabina said.

There was no need for him to ask “who?” Leonard Testarossa had roughly guessed.

“It’s about him right?”

“Yes, Sagara Sousuke.”

Chapter 2: Briefing

From far away, he could hear the sound of the waves. There was a brick wall and a rough bed. Sunlight came from a small window.

It was one of the rooms in an old building.

Sousuke Sagara, in the middle of his hazy consciousness, proceeded through the “Data”, repeating it a thousand times.

Name, time, place.

Other than the name he knew nothing.

After being fatally wounded after killing Kurama, how long had it been since he had collapsed in the “Arena”?

Why was he alive?

Where was that place?

Asking himself those questions, he noticed that he had not asked them just once or twice.

Really. No matter how many times he woke up muddily, he knew that his body could not move, and when the nurse injected something into him, he fell into a deep sleep.

However, this time it was a little less.

He could feel a terrible pain. In his chest, back, and femur there was a slow and heavy pain. Waves of tightening agony spread throughout his whole body, causing his heart to race. His head felt like it had been hit with sandbags. But he was not sluggish.

There were dripping sounds by the side of the bed. There was also a medical monitor. The cord of the Electro-cardiogram was extended into his own body. There was also an oxygen tank and inhalers.

A thin sheet covered his body. Bandages were here and there.

Right toe. Move.

Left toe. Move.

Right hand also, and the left hand.

It seemed that his nerves were still connected. But they might have been “phantom limbs”. For people who lost their arms and legs, there was a phenomenon where they hallucinated about their own arms and legs.

“.....”

He thought of looking at his limbs firsthand and turned his head with difficulty. In addition to the furniture and medical equipments, on one side of the bed, there was a big picture hanging.

It was a panoramic picture the size of a bed.

It showed two adults extending both their hands that were very close to each other.

In the midst of the blue jungle were yellow skinned people who were half-naked. There were children, dogs and even images of deities. There were relaxed women and suffering men. In the center was a youth in a loincloth, looking up like he was shooting a basketball.

It was big, like buoyantly airing the atmosphere of despair. That was the first time that he has seen that kind of picture, but there was a strange déjà vu and familiarity to it.

“Do you know the title of that painting?” a man’s voice said.

Sousuke was not able to see the face of the person who had entered the room. With a light body, he was pushing aside the agonizing pain.

“Where did we come from, what are we, where are we going-”

Sitting beside the bed, the man peered into the face of Sousuke. He was handsome and blond with round glasses.

Michael Lemon.

“*That’s the title*” he tried to mutter, but his throat was dry and a voice did not come out; just a hoarse voice, with his lips moving like he was chewing. Even then, Lemon understood him, and said a short “aah”.

“Of course that’s a replica. It’s a famous painting.”

“It’s Gauguin, right?”

This time a voice came out.

“That’s unexpected. Aside from weapons and military, you also know other things.”

“I saw it in an art book.”

Opening his mouth Sousuke nostalgically remembered the complex and difficult speech coming out of his art teacher.

“I see. You also went to high school....”

Pulling the wooden chair nearby, Lemon put the back rest in front and let both his elbow hang on them.

Seeing that appearance, Sousuke said, “What’s the situation?”

Knowing that he was alive was already enough. Without any feelings or greetings, he had to know what he needed to know.

Lemon let out a sound with his nose like he was surprised and shook his shoulders, and then let out a small sigh.

“Situation huh, then let me tell you. It’s been 56 days since Nami died, today is May 20th.”

“-----”

“Fighting with that man Kurama, you were fatally wounded. The rifle bullets went through your body. It was a miracle that you still lived. Your heart, aorta, and spine are fine but you lost a part of your liver and kidney. Your digestive organs have also been

shortened. You won't be able to drink alcohol anymore. You also need to moderate your food intake."

Sousuke didn't even move his eyebrows.

Not dying would be a cheap compensation. Besides, as far as drinking alcohol, after that one incident in Hong Kong, he had no intention of drinking ever again.

"I should be saying that you're lucky. If we didn't administer emergency treatment, it would only have been a matter of time before you died. In actuality, your heart stopped a number of times. There was no doubt that I used a defibrillator. We falsified your identity in the hospital at Namsak, until you could be in a situation to be operated on. But in that hospital there was no surgeon that could save you. With pursuing the enemy being dangerous, we moved you in critical condition, transporting you to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. I held my breath until the hospital. By chance there was a good French surgeon who was an NGO on active duty. After revealing your identity the surgery commenced. It took 20 hours. It was difficult to keep away those nosey locals, since there were after incidents we had to deal with---"

After hearing that, Sousuke interrupted Lemon.

"I understand. There has to be a reason you saved me."

"Well. At least to have a conversation like this."

Lemon's voice had a somewhat tedious sound, but at the same time it had a sound that seemed like something was wrong.

Anyhow, the operation to save Sousuke was an immensely difficult task. He tried to think of the reason why he was saved.

As for reasons, there were a number of them that were troublesome.

"You regained consciousness for a number of times, but were in no condition to make conversation. Muttering a number of places, then later only repeating 'Getting back' and 'Take back'."

“I don’t remember.”

“Well, that’s right.”

After muttering that, Lemon took out a cigarette from the chest pocket of his short sleeved shirt. He lit a match and then blew out some unimpressive smoke. After living with Lemon for more than a month, this was the first time that he had seen Lemon take a smoke.

He must have noticed Sousuke’s look. Lemon glanced at his own cigarette, shrugging his shoulders.

“I really smoked.”

Saying that, the cigarette caught between his fingers-he was winding up the tip.

“When I had the chance of becoming the timid photographer, I thought of quitting. But I guess it’s no use.”

“Is that so?”

Giving a comprehending sound, Sousuke thought of the last moments of Kurama.

“After passing over your difficult condition, we went to bury her. Transporting her until her home village.”

“.....”

“After the burial, 100 meters away from the grave, I took a puff. Maybe I loved her. After choking on the smoke, I cried a lot. I think I cried a good ten years worth.”

After saying that, Lemon did not show any emotions. His was a voice like it was a thing of the past.

“It’s not like I blame you.” he said. “We both are at fault. We mutually used her, got her involved, and then we let her die. That’s how the field is, that’s how it is. Well, someday-”

Throwing away the cigarette by the bed, he extinguished it with his shoe sole.



“..Someday, we will receive retribution.”

Lemon fell silent, staring at a spot in the wall with depressed eyes.

The sunlight coming from the windows created a deep shadow. Sousuke had seen people with that facial expression many

times. He had seen this face before in his comrade in arms. It was the kind of look of death that came as a peculiar characteristic of a life and death occupation. Was it new, or was it there before, he did not know. It was just that the shadow felt like death himself.

“Where is this place?” Sousuke inquired.

Lemon looked over the picture behind him.

“That painting is a hint. The painter had his life ended in this place. In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the Hiva Oa island of the Marquesas Archipelagos. From the perspective of a Frenchman like me, you would say that it is the furthest end of the world.”

Marquesas Archipelagos. The corner of Polynesia.

Surely that was French Territory, but Sousuke was still thinking of the reason they had moved him into such a remote region.

Most probably, to hide him from someone. That was the only rough conjecture he could make from the organization’s standpoint.

“From now on if you will not clearly answer my questions, your life will also end here.”

“I don’t think so.”

“We didn’t save you just because of friendship and good faith. What we want from you is information. We, the DGSE, want information on both Amalgam and Mithril.”

Pushing up his glasses and looking at Sousuke, Lemon sat in the chair.

“Then, let’s start the questions,” he said in a business like tone.



The instant evening arrived, Lemon left Sagara Sousuke's room.

He came out from a corridor of a temple.

It was an old church which was erected in the 19th century. Although well known among tourists, there was no one there worshipping. In the surrounding area the Special Forces colleagues of Lemon guarded the area, preventing people who knew nothing from coming near.

Havi Oa Island, which was situated near the equator, was incredibly hot that day. The dry sun shone in the wharf and sea outside the window. Coming out from the dark room, Lemon's eyes absconded. Only the cool winds blowing by the stone path gave relief.

His superior, who had been waiting in the temple, approached him.

His name was Delecour. He was over 40, with black hair and a reserved mouth. He and Lemon were both agents of the Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieur, and had been together in a number of operations.

"How was it? Did the kid say anything?" Delecour asked.

"I wonder-"

Lemon shrugged his shoulders.

"-slippery as an eel. Keeps repeating 'I don't know' 'I don't remember'. Since he doesn't have the strength, he won't be able to go through with torture. Although, he spoke about information regarding his annihilated organization with no hesitation."

"....."

"He was discrete with the information about the submarine and his unit. Rather, he was trying to figure out what we already know."

With regards to news about the ship that the American Navy calls “Toy Box”, their organization had not been able to get any information.

There was information that it was sunk. There was also information that it was currently hidden in the Pacific Ocean. The truth was, Lemon and the other still did not know.

Even Sousuke, who was affiliated with that unit, really did not have any news of his colleagues.

“How about the others? It doesn’t matter about the mysterious submarine. What we want is the information about Amalgam”

Hiding his irritation, Delecour cross-examined Lemon.

“Originally, the investigation was a blatant interference in the market for weapons, taking place from this year, it was still clearly taking place. They controlled the international conflict, forcibly preserving the rottenness of the cold war structure, and what is more important- they left us outside of the mosquito net. Either conciliation or confrontation, I’m not able to grasp their motive-”

“I know.”

Lemon was fed up and shook his head.

He didn’t like Delecour much. Progressing in elite courses since childhood, Delecour desired to be a high class bureaucrat. He had this scorn for Lemon who had worked his way up. A son of a graduate school.

“Sagara Sousuke said something about a condition in his cooperation.”

“Condition?”

“Yeah.”

“What kind of condition?”

“Weapons and ammunition, and then funds. Obtaining one unit of a simple Arm Slave, and a Transport ship. And then the preparation of a safe house in a designated place.”

After relaying Sousuke’s words, Delecour’s brow wrinkled.

“Does he intend to fight with Amalgam?”

“That seems to be what he intends to do.”

“After saving his life, he treats us like servants. Taking advantage of us.”

“Shall we meet his demands?”

“Out of the question.”

Delecour spit out the words.

“We have not yet decided to go against Amalgam. The condition that he go out will not guarantee his life.”

“Well, that’s right.”

“We will wait for him a little more to recover. Then I will directly screw with him.”

After saying that Delecour must have been serious. Waiting for his strength to recover, the scrupulous medicine dosage was already prepared for Sousuke’s severe torture.

Lemon had no authority to stop it. Thinking of what had been happening, he felt gloominess.

“Do you disapprove?”

“No....”

“We will be needing restraints soon. Put on some handcuffs.”

“It’s still not necessary. He can only nod. There is nothing unusual at the time being.”



But what was unusual happened that night.

The church that housed Sousuke was built on the slop of a mountain facing the sea, in the southeastern portion of a lone island in the distant seas. The agents, who were dressed in tourist garments, did not stand out. It was a reasonable place to be a safe house for a spy organization.

The locals had not heard that the church was bought by a rich man to be used casually. There were also no traders around.

There were several 29SA-DGSE Special Forces members alternating in guard duty. They were in civilian clothes with a sunglass type of night vision, and small machine pistols hidden under their aloha shirts.

Of course it was hopeless equipment for perfect security.

But if a local youth or tourist happened to get lost- the largest possibility of happening- chasing them away by showing them body armor and carbine guns was not a good plan. They would be calling for big trouble.

On that night, there was a young sentry on duty that walked alone by the wharf where the waves were breaking. Originating from the army, he passed the severe training and test and was finally able to go on a mission.

He couldn't help but sigh over the boring mission. He was not an old guard, but he was taken into the position of a patrol mission. He doubted that whoever was transferred into the church was an important person. Even if he was a sentry in a remote region, being a man who was unlucky with his work, he was not selected as a member of the Special Forces.

For that reason, from the ocean below the wharf, he discovered three men trying to disembark. They had dark diving equipment and the newest carbine guns. They were also wearing waterproof Tactical Vests. It was obvious at one look that those were not local youths or tourists.

Of course he made a stance with his gun at the development, but he did not say “Stop! What are you doing!”. He immediately informed the wireless radio hidden on his body with a small voice.

“Efemel 4 to Efemel 1. There are three men, armed intruders, discovered in E12. Please give instructions.”

Immediately the officer, Delecour, responded.

“This is Efemel 1. Continue observation. Reinforcements will arrive within three minutes.”

“Efemel 4 Roger. Out.”

After cutting off the communication, he silently moved near the shadowy rock. From there he was in the blind spot of the disembarking enemy. He moved up about 100 meters to observe them.

At that time, there was a hand from behind wrapping its way around his neck.

“.....!”

He was unable to shake it off. A knife was pointed at his throat.

There had been four of them.

“Where is Sagara Sousuke?”

A whisper like the God of Death.

“I ask you again. Where is Sagara Sousuke?”

He did not answer.

In response to the silence, the man said, “I admire your guts.”

There was a burning pain in his back. The knife had penetrated his kidney. The enemy, without mercy, drove the knife into his body. With the shock of an external wound and with no will to resist, he did not utter a sound.

The knife was pulled out.

That was followed by two stabs in the left chest, and finished off with a slash to the throat. He collapsed on the rocky area. Not finishing it with one blow, but certainly killing him by stabbing him in various vital spots, it was an exemplary method of killing with a knife.



Something was strange.

That was what Sousuke felt. He heard the sound of hurried footsteps in the corridor in a defense formation.

He could hear dim exchanges over wireless radios. It would have been best if he had a French dictionary at hand to read. As it was, he was not able to understand the subject of the conversation. There seemed to be a change in the situation. He was certain that he felt something.

There was a presence in that place.

The thirst for blood.

Riding the sea breeze from somewhere, the smell of blood was drifting around him. It was from somewhere far away, but his sensitive sense of smell did not overlook it.

Someone had died.

Killed.

At the same time as that realization he heard the sounds of gunfire outside.

The sound of small caliber and submachine guns firing. Probably an M4 or MP5. Aside from the obvious cover fire, there was no use of burst firing or full auto firing. Firing only when needed, the rhythm of a battle between professionals.

Waking up, and immediately realizing that-

“.....”

Sousuke endured the pain and tried to get his head up. Again the violent pain attacked him. With an irregular movement in his head, he shook his fingertips bit by bit.

But he had to get up.

He had nothing to do with the noise outside- there was the temptation to just go back to sleep. He endured the pain and put aside that urge. If the situation was as Lemon had said, he considered that the battle outside would come around.

Planting his hand firmly on the bed, he somehow managed to lift his upper body. It was difficult, like lifting a hundred kilos of sandbags. Enduring the pain, he raised his body. Turning his body, he took off the pipes and cords connected to him. He somehow managed to carry himself and got up from the bed.

His strength was surprisingly weak. If he believed Lemon's words, he had been asleep for a month and a half. And then-

"Dammit..."

After looking at his arm, Sousuke uttered an abusive word. It looked like this body was someone else's, thin and weak. It was like a girl's arm. Without joke, he might even lose in arm wrestling with Teletha Testarossa or Tokiwa Kyouko.

The gunfire continued intermittently, slowly getting nearer to him.

What about weapons....?

None.

What was available there were the droplets of needles.

How about an escape route....?

None.

The door of the room was locked with a key. When Lemon left, he heard the lock of the door turning. He could break the suspicious glass window, but it was high up and small. Crawling out that way was impossible the way he was right then.



In the first place, he doubted that he could stand or even walk.

He heard the gunshots and screams from the corridor.

It was not that far. No, it was near. There was no mistake that the enemy would break into his room.

Sousuke smacks his lips, only seeing a handful of items inside the room.

What was available was medical equipment, needle sets, a medical use tank, and a mineral water bottle. And then he himself remained. He had no chance of fighting with a trained enemy, much less winning.

When the enemy came in he would be at his wit's end and shot to death.

There was no way to counterattack.

No-

With only instinct and knowledge, Sousuke moved.

Enduring the agony with all his strength, he lowered his feet from the bed. If he could not stand then it will be over, but Sousuke succeeded in supporting his body with both his legs.

Walking unsteadily with the electro-cardiogram on the side, he extended his hands to the medical use oxygen tank. He tried to tear off the tube attached to the tank. He couldn't do it; he didn't have the strength. He opened the tank valve to its maximum, and hit the inhaler mask a number of times on the wall.

The valve broke, and the sound of vapor leaking out resounded.

Just breaking off the inhaler had exhausted his physical strength. Sousuke raised and lowered his shoulders. He left the crude desk and grabbed the pet bottle. It was an absurd weight. He sprinkled the contents of the mineral water on top of the bed sheet. It was a difficult effort.

He wet his head with the remaining one-fifth water of the bottle. Rolling on the wet sheet, he wretched it around his tired body.

“.....”

He waited like that.

He rest would be a gamble.

He crouched down by the side of the bed. In his right hand was a needle that had previously been stuck inside him. He prepared himself for troubled breathing.

There were gunshots outside. The sounds of leaking vapor from the oxygen tank still filled the room. There was pain throughout his body, he ignored it. He had done this a number of times in the past. In one way or another.

Gunshots again.

This time it was close.

In less than a few seconds, the door of the room was kicked open; there was one man in a black combat uniform stepping in. There was no wasted movement.

Aiming the barrel of his carbine gun, the man asked, “You’re Sagara Sousuke right?”

“Even if I say your mistaken you’ll shoot right?”

“That’s right.”

The man fired.

At the same time Sousuke turned his body.

He evaded the first bullet, and Sousuke understood that there would be continuous firing. But in the next instant the air in front of the man’s eyes exploded.

“!?”

The fierce flame swelled in the hand of the man.

Just like a gas burner, in an instant the flames surrounded the man three to four meters wide. He could hear the slow and heavy sound of an explosion.

It was the oxygen coming out of the medical use tank that had filled the room.

If it caught fire, it would cause an explosion instantly. Although not comparable to the military plastic explosives, like a giant gas lighter, it would attack the eyes when ignited.

The flames rushed over to Sousuke, who was on top of the bed. It was like a violent fever all over his body.

“.....!”

In spite of holding his breath the hot air jumped into his nose and throat. If he were not covered with the wet sheets, he might have received a heavy injury.

Overcoming his body's “high fever”, he heard the screams of the enemy.

“Aaah~!! A, aah~!”

The man had let go of this gun and was screaming with both of his hands covering his eyes. The flames burned his eyes. Sousuke immediately stood from the bed- he was fast at first- staggering to the door he stood and headed for the enemy.

The painting on the wall was burning.

Where did we come from, what are we, where are we going.

“Chidori....” he muttered with a delirious voice.

Sousuke immediately grappled with the other man, taking the automatic pistol from the holster behind him. Then, clinging to the opponent, he pushed the mouth of the gun to below the chin of the man. The man cried out in confusion, then Sousuke pulled the trigger.

With a deafening scream, the man broke down and died.

“.....”

There was something burning in the rear, it might have been because of the painting that had disappeared into blackness. Sousuke somehow felt an excessively unbearable mood. He did not know what kind of guy that man was, but he had been trying to kill

him. He had no reason to think about pity. Even then, continuing with something like that, he felt a heavy helplessness.

The nightmare still continued-

It would have been better if he had died in that arena. There was some unknown will that was ordering him “don’t die yet, continue killing”.

Sousuke knelt beside the corpse, taking the equipment off the enemy.

Tactical Vest. Digital Communicator. Carbine gun. Ammunitions. The blood stained knife. Phosphorous grenade. The medical kit of the survival kit. He put the vest on his naked upper body. Putting the pistol by his hip, he slung the carbine gun over his shoulder. Like this, Sousuke stepped out of the room.

It looked like the building was some kind of old church. He didn’t know what had happened to Lemon and the others. Did they run away to somewhere, or were they dead?

Anyway he had to get away from that place. And then go hide somewhere. It would be unpleasant to be in a place full of people, so it should be on a nearby mountain. And somehow he would recover his strength.

That was at least what he thought then.

“.....”

His breathing was rough. His legs felt heavy.

The carbine gun he took from the enemy and the other equipment were very heavy. He felt like he was carrying 50 kilo cement bags on both his shoulders. He couldn’t believe he had ever carried something like that as though it were light.

There was a corpse in front of him.

He was wearing civilian clothes; it must have been a colleague of Lemon. Black hair with a reserved mouth. A man over 40.

Looking at the face of that dead person, why did Sousuke feel like he remembered it? Could it be that during the vague consciousness during his critical condition a month and a half ago, that he had met the man a number of times?

Coming out of the path was a wide space.

It was a church after all. When he went out, he saw that it was a place of worship with a high ceiling.

In the gloomy darkness, there was the silver light of the moonlight falling through the stained glass. In that beam of light, Lemon and a number of men were standing.

“Don’t shoot!” Lemon sharply ordered to the men who were aiming at Sousuke.

“Look carefully. It’s him.”

After saying that Lemon and the others came near. Sousuke, with staggering arms, stopped aiming the carbine gun at them.

“Sousuke. You were alright.” Lemon said.

“Unfortunately. What about the enemy?”

“The enemy outside were mostly taken care of. It seems that one of the enemy headed in here. Then we heard a large explosion a while ago...”

After saying that, Lemon glanced at the gun and equipment of Sousuke, knitting his brows.

“Those are the enemy’s weapons. Did you kill him?”

“Affirmative.”

“Then, we repelled the enemy.... but, they were able to attack this far.”

In front of Lemon, smacking his lips, Sousuke staggered unsteadily, leaning in the nearby wall.

“Your colleague died over there.”

“What kind of guy?”

“About 40 years old, a reserved mouth and black hair.”

After hearing that, Lemon's eye widened. Looking down he closed his eyes.

"Delecour huh. Dammit."

"But it looks like the enemy was after me."

"Yeah. Why do you say that?"

"They knew my name."

"Is that so?"

Standing there was difficult, Sousuke gave his back to the wall.

"And then? With that Rambo appearance, what do you plan to do now?"

"I plan to get away. But, it looks impossible."

At Sousuke's exhausted words, Lemon let out a smile.

"Aah, that's right. You're not the invincible Superman. Now you have to get your strength back."

"That's right."

"The problem is, even to this opposite side of the world, there are guys who came here to kill you"

"Aah."

"Do you know the reason for that? They regard you highly, purposely dispatching military personnel to kill you. Although I can guess, I don't have the confidence. Can you tell us why?"

Walking to the side, Lemon looked into the face of Sousuke.

"I don't know." Sousuke muttered, covered with wounds not yet fully healed. "They really hate me."

"That's not the only reason is it?"

"There is another possible reason I can think of."

"And that is?"

"It's Al." Sousuke told them the name of his partner.

“It might mean that guy’s still alive. If Amalgam has gotten hold of that kind of information... Well, they think the combination of me and him would be a ‘threat’ to them. They’re trying to test which one of us they can kill.”



There were piles of problems for Teletha Testarossa.

Playing the drama for a whole week was very tiring for her body and the mind and she was not able to rest well.

Firstly, there was the settlement of the operation in San Francisco. In terms of the flashy AS battle, at least there were very few eye-witnesses. There was no talk of it as far as they could tell. Before, with Mithril’s power, they could easily falsify information and claim things like “it was a dispute between drug cartels” or some such reason. But, isolated as they were now, that was no longer possible. She needed a way to manage the information but the ship’s AI, Dana, and the subordinates were busy with various operational checks. Eventually she had to take care of it herself.

After the confluence of the *Tuatha de Danaan*, which was on standby on the Californian Sea, it was difficult to erase themselves from the prying eyes of the US Navy and Coast guard.

The people in the American Navy were not fools. And the *de Danaan* had been commissioned for more than one and a half years. As for developing a means to detect the ship, they were in the process of finishing the results. With their detection system steadily progressing, Tessa and the others were more restricted in making moves.

After three days of secretly cruising, and after reaching 120 miles off the coast of Mexico, Tessa finally reduced the alert level of the ship. The order was repeated by the Vice Captain Mardukas,

and the ship's AI silently announced the news. The crew that finally received the order let out a sigh of relief.

"Captain, 2 hours from now Lt. Clouseau will be waiting." Mardukas informed her.

"That's right. Let's go."

She stood up from the Captain's seat. Usually her ash blond hair was carefully braided, casually bundled in the back of her head. It had been around two days since she took a shower. There was no time for her to groom herself; the situation in those three days had left her no personal time. If she had been a male captain, the unshaved face would be left as is.

Leaving the maneuvering and observation to the officer on duty, she headed into the briefing room with Mardukas from the bridge. The sailor and officers that they met on route saluted to her, even in that kind of situation. At the same time that the military organization Mithril was annihilated, there was no longer a need for such salutes, but no matter how many times it was said, the crew would not abide.

"Everyone is tired." Tessa muttered, who was completely exhausted herself. But she had to put on an air for her subordinates. Using all of her will to straighten up, she energetically walked with a quick pace.

"Yes Captain. Although our morale has not yet been influenced, we are worried about a miss or an accident" Mardukas, following behind, said with a small voice. "If possible half a day. They need at least 8 hours of rest."

"Impossible. We rest six hours then head south."

Because Mardukas was the one who said it, Tessa knew better than to take his words lightly. But 6 hours was all they could spare, so they had to compromise. Remaining any longer than that would be equivalent to handing themselves over to the US navy.

In addition, the Navy's information could also be stolen by Amalgam.

"It's not for the subordinates. It's for you."

As expected, Mardukas was persistent.

"After the decoy in San Francisco, you have not yet rested. You have secluded yourself into ordering the crew. Right about now, on the bridge, Lt. Godard is telling the crew 'The Captain is tired'."

"If there was consent, would it be alright to proceed?"

Tessa asked while trying to kill the desperate irritation gushing from inside her. And she immediately regretted what she said. "I'm sorry, it is as you said. I will be careful."

"No..."

"But, the limit of taking a rest is 6 hours. There will be plenty of time to rest later. Let's try our best a little more."

Reasserting her perfect smile, it seemed that there was no effect on Mardukas. He halted and, briefly affirming that there was no one eavesdropping, he formally said. "Captain, would it be alright for a little while?"

"What will?"

"My loyalty has not changed. The crew also. After escaping from Merida Island, the details are certainly clear."

"Yes."

Agreeing, Tessa remembered receiving the aggressiveness of the enemy while escaping Merida Island.



Narrowly escaping the attacks of the three giant Behemoths, the *de Danaan*, which had received large damage, managed to escape. Tessa and the others, with their experience and knowledge,

mobilized. One way or another they had managed to get away from the enemy pursuit. If the attack had gotten the attention of the American army, it would have been difficult to escape their watching eyes. If it had been an ordinary submarine and commander, they would not have been able to escape the siege.

Shaking off the enemy in the mean time, they arrived at the coast of Indonesia, Tessa announced. Inside the ship she informed her subordinates that the other squads had received the same attack.

In essence, it was plain that Mithril had been destroyed.

Without the organization that had been supporting them, they chased after the enemy in isolation.

The enemy, Amalgam, had people setting up conflicts all over the world. They effectively produced civil war and regional conflicts, changing the state of the world. From those conflicts they made their profits.

And in those circumstances, after the explaining the basis and source of her information, she had said:

“-of course the construction of ‘Absolute peace’, or ‘Permanent peace’ would not be possible. Basing it on that, Mithril was using violence to aim at having ‘Peace as much as possible’. Following the right or wrong of military power, there was no intention of saying this or that. Although it is called the waste of humans from the advocates of ideal peace, you cannot shake the fragments of it. Even if you call it that, it is still violence. There is no honor or merit. On top of that, with this ship- I will not let go of history’s greatest device of violence. Completely interfering with them, I plan to completely corner them. Let’s stop with the whitewashing. This is just revenge. The debt to the many people who died on Merida Island, I plan on repaying that. Although it is difficult, there is also no reason why we cannot win.”

Tessa fully remembered saying these words, along with the sensation of gripping the mic.

“Satisfactory wages can no longer be paid. From now on everyone will be exposed to danger. As mercenaries, you are not obligated to comply. There is a helicopter in the storage deck for personnel to get on. The helicopter will fly to Jakarta, from then on everyone is free to live their life. There is no need for Commissioned and non-commissioned officers to hesitate. For those who wish to leave, go to the storage deck after one hour. That is all.”

At the end, with an unconcerned expression, Tessa finished her long speech and switched off the mic.

She also thought that the essential members of the bridge needed time to think.

Leaving her seat on the bridge, she had secluded herself in the Captain’s quarters and waited for one hour. In that time Mardukas tried to speak with her, but she had firmly rejected him. Also, her close friend, Melissa Mao, had knocked on her door. But she turned her away from behind the door saying “return to the waiting room, I’m thinking.”

At the most, it would be good if thirty percent of the crew remained, she thought.

No, it would not be strange if only twenty percent were left. At least she was conscious of that kind of reasonable state. The helicopter that could carry a hundred personnel might have required a return trip a number of times. Thinking of that arrangement, while considering the problem of insufficient supplies, an hour passed.

Tessa headed to the storage deck from the Captain’s quarters. Opening the heavy door on her own, she entered.

There were at least 100 crew members stationed in the storage deck. Kurz, Mao and even Clouseau were there. There was no state of tension in their appearance as they all chattered individually.

“Only this?” Tessa asked them, thinking it was unexpectedly small.

And then Mao knitted her brow and said, “What?”

“What you mean... the people who would leave the ship...”

“Aah. Then that would be them over there.”

Mao pointed her chin on the other direction.

Beside the transport helicopter, there was a group of 20 people. There were 10 people who needed medical treatment. There were 3 attending nurses. Overall 33 people.

Only 33 people.

“The ones leaving have wives and kids. Well, it’s not unreasonable.” Kurz said.

“How about you people?”

They glanced at Tessa and shrugged their shoulders.

“Take a look Tessa. The ones stationed here, landing unit, Base personnel, and Maintenance crew. Right now, there’s nothing to do so they are here. Incidentally the other base personnel were helping in the ships work, studying the duties of here and there.”

“B..but....how about the others? There has got to be someone who has doubts?”

After Tessa emphasized, all personnel exchanged glances.

“I give up. Hey, anybody there?”

No one replied. No, there was a lone second class soldier in charge of supplies who raised his hand and called.

“Captain. There is a video tape of a drama, will you give me permission to disembark? No, I’ll come back immediately...”

At once the 100 personnel all laughed. In the center of their ring, there was a giant Maintenance Officer who was gulping down a cola, Sachs, who pushed his way through the crowd.

“...well, that’s about it, Captain. It’s just, the livelihood in this ship, we can live off it, if you want to fire us now is the time! Right Master?” Sachs said turning his head.

From the crowd there was a plump middle aged man- the owner of the tavern, Darza, on Merida Island base- waved his hand and shouted out with “idiot” in a loud voice.

“If you think we’re useless, then that’s a big mistake. Are you stupid? For me, we are mercenaries with severe military fame in Africa. It would be better if we appoint a successor to the Russian.”

“That’s right. In place of Lt. Commander Kalinin the old man can take charge of the operation. From now on you’re Perth One!”

“Well everyone really can’t drink while working.”

“Fool, we didn’t even have the time to move a single drop of alcohol. Bringing in worthless things, there’s already a mountain of idiotic luggage. Really, those idiots.”

Everyone hit his hand.

Tessa only found out later, the owner of Darza indeed didn’t bring a single drop of alcohol. However the decoration in the tavern with Lt. McAllen and the pictures of those who were killed in action had been crammed together in the sack he brought onto the ship.

“If we run away then Man will become obsolete, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Oh my? Please don’t forget that there are also women here.” the Technical Officer, Lemming, raised her voice from the crowd.

Immediately beside her Viran, the secretary of Tessa, and Shinohara, who was in charge of communication (who had a bottle of cola), said “same here” in unison.

“Still, but....a number of people were already lost right? We don’t know what will happen, I want to explain clearly. Even then, why, this is....”

Losing her words there, Tessa stood stock still. Mardukas, who was coming near, unnoticed, from behind her said, “Really...there is no other way with this unsatisfactory mob.”

“Mardukas-san?”

“Well, I’m also one of them.”

At those words everyone laughed. Only this time Mardukas did not let out the rough scolding of “Silence!”.

In the noisiness he informed Tessa.

“Captain. To be able to work for you, everyone is happy. Among the soldiers it is like a dream. That is you. Of course we did think of you as an ignorant and conceited girl the first time. But this time it’s different.”

“.....”

“For something a veteran with long military service was not able to do, you brought us this far. And it is because you said to fight, we are happy to follow you. In addition you said those words with the real motive of your heart. If ever you had said ‘For the sake of peace’ in that speech of yours, I too would have left this ship.”

Only for revenge.

Tessa herself didn’t think that it was that simple. However, it had moved them strongly; the fact was that it was a primitive move.

Not because of morality. Not because of Honor.



The soldiers followed her for their own revenge. Most of it had been in response to her expectations, but it was completely unexpected. Leaving behind the abusive curses, in the end they could not complain.

“That’s....”

If it was her previous self, she would have crumbled and cried right there. But that was not so. No subordinates would demand such a thing.

Instead she put both her hands on her hips, informing them at the same time with a clear voice.

“I understand. But, as I said earlier there will be no salary okay? We can at least somehow manage food. And that is all. Would that be alright?”

“Uh-”

“Well, it can’t be helped...”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Broken responses were made. She drew a big breath, then shouted at once.

“Wrong. What would be your response!?”

Everyone, in confusion, put their voices together.

“Yes Ma’am!”

“Good.”

Nodding with a composed face, a queer silence controlled the place. And then unable to bear it, Tessa burst out into laughter, followed by a loud laugh by everyone. An inappropriate laughter flowed in the hanger, echoing.

She herself did not know what was strange. It might be due to the tension following tension that there was no longer a strange feeling in her nerves. Rolling around in laughter, finally the tears she barred started to flow. Everyone did not put on airs, she only told them “dismissed”, and everyone departed.

When the goodbyes had been said to those who would disembark, it took about 30 minutes and they were gone.



“Captain?” Mardukas said to Tessa who had an unsettled reflection.

“Eh? Ah, I’m sorry”

Returning to her face, her face that was tired of the long operation, Mardukas carefully observed.

“..... right now, as I said before, what I am worried about is your fatigue. With the subordinates having these conditions, do you still feel responsible?”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know if I’m thinking too much. Originally, I feel that you should go to a tourist spot somewhere to relax for about a month.”

“I can’t, right?”

Although he said it with a sort of snorting, Mardukas did not laugh.

“That’s it?”

“Huh?”

“The former you would have answered with a lot more wit. ‘Then everyone should go occupy that island, and enjoy themselves’, or something like that..... No, I have no talent for such jokes, I can’t say it very well-- at the very least, you would not reply with ‘I can’t’.”

“.....”

“Right now you do not have enough humor. Your mind being tired is proof enough that you’re thinking of too many things.”

At the words of Mardukas, Tessa calmly scrutinized. Certainly what he said really hit the spot, but it did not mean that she needed rest in their current condition.

Nevertheless-

She finally noticed.

Mardukas- For a stubborn and straight faced man like him to say with sarcasm “You do not have enough humor” was something strange, why did she not notice earlier? Was that not proof enough that she was tired herself?

“That’s right....” Tessa answered without strength. “I will remember. But, anyway right now we have to discuss this.”

“Yes.” Mardukas replied in a voice mixed with shame.

They began walking again. Finally they reached the briefing room. Inside were Ben Clouseau and Melissa Mao. Kurz Weber was also waiting.

Since the commander of the landing team, Kalinin, was no longer there, his successor became Clouseau. They had also lost the commissioned officer, Castello, and his responsibilities had fallen to Mao.

And most recently Kurz carried various assignments. Previously Mao was the sub-leader of the SRT, and also arranged the work of the non-commissioned soldiers. After the destruction of Mithril, it would be natural that their ranks would be on a skeletal force. In order make clear their chain of command, Tessa bequeathed the general idea of their ranking. Clouseau was designated to Lt. Commander, Mao became the First Lieutenant.

Kurz was designated as Master Sergeant. His promotion was the recommendation of Tessa, she thought that Kurz and Clouseau had a dog and monkey relationship.

At that time Tessa asked Clouseau “Do you think he can do it?”, and he had said, “If it’s him then he can do it. His experience and skill is top class, you will know if you see it. Even Lt. Commander McAllen recognized this. Although there is some reluctance” with discomfort.

Kurz himself liked the idea of “Master Sergeant Weber”. The soldiers even said “The Master Sergeant is calling”. At most,

plenty of soldiers were milling in their ears, “Master Sergeant Weber. The 10 dollars you borrowed the other day, hurry in paying it up idiot” or “Master Sergeant Weber, if you have so much time help out in peeling the potatoes, stupid”, they said it as much as they wanted.

Although he had a different method from a typical senior non-commissioned officer, this must have been because of his personal sociability and friendliness. In actuality, Kurz had no problems regarding troubles arising from the soldiers. Although he was as talkative as ever, he no longer made disruptions as he pleased. And it seemed that he had become something of an advisor to the inexperienced soldiers.

Clouseau and Mao had noticed it earlier; Kurz had the character of a leader. Mostly, similar to Tessa, there was a variation in the responsibilities of a commissioned officer. If you looked at it, it was close to a captain of a baseball or basketball team.

Incidentally Yang Jun-Kyu and Sandarapta (who were injured during the battle on Merida Island), who were the remains of the SRT, remained on the ship for medical treatment, at that time they were in rehabilitation and basic training.

The current situation of the *de Danaan* had roughly become like that.

The greatest pending question, the problem of resupplying, had been settled.

Nobody knew but off the coast of Indonesia, on a solitary island, there was information regarding reserved supplies, which was inputted by someone into the *de Danaan*. One day after the escape from Merida Island, the *de Danaan* received that information.

Of course it might have been a trap from someone. However, there was no other choice. With vigilance the *de Danaan* headed to the accurate coordinates of the information. What awaited them, left on the solitary island, were dozens of containers full of ammunitions, fuel, food, and spare parts.

There was clearly no one who could have prepared the supplies, but Tessa and Mardukas had a vague feeling.

There was someone who could possibly do that. Taking Mithril on a different and opposite route, with heavy prudence, making *de Danaan* pinpoint the necessary supplies.

Aside from Andrei Kalinin they could think of no one else.

At that point in time, they thought that in eight or nine cases out of ten that he was dead. Even then, how he could have prepared such a detailed cache while Tessa and the others did not notice was still a mystery.

“Thank you for waiting” Tessa told Clouseau, Mao, and Kurz in the briefing room. She said “As you were” to Clouseau, who stood up, and took a seat herself in a chair.

“As you have thought, the tides are flowing fast. We really took our time. I’m sorry about that.”

“No” Clouseau answered with his hips falling.

“And then on top of the damage in capturing Fowler, for us in following the compass in our mobilization...”

“Yes, but unfortunately, we were not able to capture the tail of Leonard Testarossa. It’s not that we have to find another route but...”

Tessa, who spoke the name of her own brother like a complete stranger, was already familiar with that face. Her brother managed Amalgam into action, contributing greatly to the organization with his technical skills. He had already taken them in all directions.

“Even if we do follow them, we can’t really locate them. For a situation like this, we had to dispatch the majority of the base personnel. In these few months they would construct the information network.”

The base personnel, who had escaped Merida Island, had already disembarked. They were going to different locations around the world, doing activities in their fields of expertise: buying supplies, computing the budget, the program for resupply, and their escorts.

Of course there was also information gathering and the search and contact of the remnants of Mithril.

In order to maintain the means of contacting and secrecy of their allies, Tessa and the others devoted one month for the preparation.

“That’s why, it’s not that easy to pinpoint the whereabouts of the enemy right? They’re not even professional spies” Mao said.

“Yes. That is why, for those who were dispatched, it’s a priority that we contact the remains of Mithril.For example, Sagara-san would also search for us from somewhere. If we can contact people such as him, we would be getting some sort of clue.”

Saying the name of Sagara Sousuke, Mao and the others were a bit sad.

“Sousuke huh...” said, Mao.

“We don’t know if he’s still alive.” said Clouseau.

“Ha. I don’t think that guy would die that easily” said Kurz with a strange confidence. Then he sighed.

“...even then, you have to make this clear, Tessa.”

“About what?”

“The reason for your prejudice towards your brother. Because you’re simply relatives, or because he’s the manager, that

kind of reason is not acceptable. There's definitely some other reason right?" Kurz said strongly.

"Weber..." Clouseau rebuked from the side.

"It's alright, Clouseau-san."

"But...."

"I think it is high time you know. Because I'm not even sure myself, and it has been vague until now, but I will tell you."

Actually, she had not told anyone of this. Why was she targeting Leonard herself? Why was she persistently chasing after him? She did not know up to where she would talk, but daring to prostrate herself up to that point, she explained to the four subordinates that she trusted the most.

"Amalgam is an unusually tough organization" Tessa said, choosing her words carefully. "The construction of their organization is unlike the pyramid type of Mithril, but more like a spider's web with an usually complex command system. Of course among them there is a manager. Speaking of this manager, you can think of this net as a 'node'. More or less a 'highly efficient node'. However, even if we render the manager powerless, the damage to the organization would be insignificant."

"Why is that? Won't the command system be in confusion?" Kurz asked blankly.

"Because it's a scale free network. There are other hubs that will take its place" Mao muttered.

"That is correct. You already know of this, but, the internet originally was a system made for the survival of the command system of the US which was scattered into various places to protect from the whole nuclear threat of the Russians. Amalgam took the concept of this system, an eccentric secret society. There is a man of influence in the organization, but his true significance does not exists as the 'Summit of the Pyramid'. Everyone can carry the part

of decision making, everyone has the ability to make use of the arms.”

“Oh my, like a democracy” Mardukas complained with sarcasm.

“It is democracy. That is why the decision making is slow. But difficult to break with overwhelming strength. That kind of bothersome organization.”

“Um? In other words? Sorry, I really don’t understand it well” Kurz said with a scowling face.

Then Clouseau hesitantly replied, “In the example of a game or anime, there is no boss character to defeat in order to get the conclusion.”

“Hahaa...”

“There are many bosses there. And nobody can pinpoint them. But if you were to exterminate them, the other bosses will organically move and complete the organization. Like hitting moles that will not end.”

“I see. ...then, hey hey! How do we fight with those guys?” Kurz’s voice nearly reached a scream.

“At first glimpse, they look invincible right. You’d think they are like an unusually tough opponent. However, they are not everlasting.” Tessa said. “Like I said before, there is a ‘Prospect for victory’. Following that line of thought, I only noticed it after the Christmas incident. The report was also sent to Admiral Borda. Although the Admiral thought of seriously accepting it, before we could deal with it headquarters was exterminated... but, the author of the report on Amalgam’s weakness- in other words me- is still alive. And this type of organization’s weakness is clearly biological and engineering.”

“What do you mean?”

“I see, a virus” Mao said prudently.

Tessa expressed a smile.

“We don’t know if this will completely exterminate the organization. But, we can make them powerless similar to being dead. To the point where they could not recover. This is what I thought about our ‘Prospect of victory’.”

“But Captain-” Clouseau said. “The opponent is neither a living thing nor a computer. They are a group of people that have communications in many ways. Its exact nature can’t be understood. No matter how we prepare the virus, what would that tangible thing be able to do, I myself cannot imagine it.”

“That’s right. Me too.”

“But, how...”

“As far as I know, the idea of the virus, a genius capable of preparing it, and also capable of implementing it by infiltrating the organization and who can understand the information, there is only one man.do you understand now?”

“You mean your brother?” Kurz said.

“That is correct. I know full well his character and abilities. Of course he would have created it, in preparation for everything. The other managers did not notice it. That is why we have to search thoroughly and attack Amalgam’s connected institutions by destroying the manufacturing plant of their fuselage. We have to capture Leonard Testarossa alive, by all means necessary, and have him cooperate with us.”

“By all means, you mean...”

Tessa with cold eyes, nodded unconcerned.

“By all means. You don’t need any explanations right?”

“B..but...”

“Thank you. But it’s alright.”

Tessa silently smiled. Kurz stopped himself from shaking. Clouseau and Mao looked seriously at her profile. Mardukas faced down with a pitiful expression.

“Fowler got away, but he did give us some useful information. Dana’s analysis is also proceeding. I will be heading this ship south, and will be on standby in the Pacific Ocean. It may also be the case that we’ll have to head to the Atlantic Ocean, but with this ships cruising capability it will take some time to get there from South America. Are there no objections?”

“Yes Captain.” Mardukas said first. The other three followed shortly. After the consultations, the meeting was over. Mardukas, Clouseau and Kurz left the room. Mao remained and asked Tessa.

“Tessa?”

“Yes?”

“Are you alright?”

Mao’s look was serious.

“Yes. Why?”

“Why... Well, I think there was something but...”

“Mardukas-san was also worried some time ago. But I’m alright.”

Tessa smiled. Mao did not smile.

“Then it’s alright. At most its 5 more hours. Eat something, and get some rest okay?”

“Yes, I plan to do so.”

“The ship’s doctor, Goldbery, also said it right? If you have an appetite..”

“Yes yes! ‘If you have an appetite, having some rest would be alright’, right? That is true, so don’t worry.”

Tessa forcefully showed a yawn, and left the briefing room.

She immediately returned to the Captain's quarters. There was a club sandwich and vegetable juice left on top of the desk. Private Kasuya from the kitchen must have left it.

It had already been half a day and she hadn't had anything to eat.

“.....”

She took a bite on the club sandwich, and forced it down her throat. But she couldn't take a second bite. She drank at least half of the vegetable juice. Then she threw the club sandwich in the bedpan of the bathroom, feeling like a criminal destroying the evidence.

She thought of taking a shower, but she didn't feel like it. She dimmed the lights, changed her clothes, and turned down the blanket on the side of the bed.

10 minutes passed. 30 minutes passed-

An hour passed, and she gave up.

She couldn't sleep.

She sat up, sluggishly taking off the blanket and keeping her back to the wall, she stared into the darkness.

Both her eyes were open.

Swirling in her head were the faces and names of her dead subordinates. The men and women who had died.

Keeping silent, she stared at a dot on the opposite wall.

Chapter 3: Ahead Towards the Enemy

All the muscles in his body were screaming.

Painful. Difficult.

His feet felt heavy. He wanted to vomit.

He felt sharp pains in his ribs with every violent breath.

His throat was dry and he was extremely thirsty.

The wet atmosphere of the jungle clung to his body. Large amount of sweat gushed out and his boots made unpleasant sounds as he advanced, step by step, through the jungle. The belt of his knapsack was eating into his shoulders. It was painful, but it couldn't be helped. Halting, he placed his hands on his knees. It had only been 30 seconds since he had last rested, or so he thought. At any rate, there was no one watching. There was no one to complain about him slacking off.

“.....”

Sousuke, enduring the pain, shook his head bit by bit. How pathetic. With the steep mountain path, he had only walked no more than 6 kilometers. And he was already like that.

One foot forward. One foot forward.

He stumbled on the root of a thick tree, staggering.

Although he had fallen down the previous time he had tripped, that time, he narrowly regained his balance. Standing still like that, he firmly endured it and continued to move.

Don't think. Run.

There was a fierce ringing in his ears from his troubled heartbeat. Its racing echoed in his ears from the nape of his neck. His field of vision began to narrow and his consciousness became hazy.

One foot forward. One foot forward.



What's the foundation of fighting? What's the foundation of a soldier? That's right, it's running.

Run. Run. Run.

Soldiers who do not run have no chance of winning. In extreme cases, it had nothing to do with skill and equipment. The Goddess of fighting only smiled upon those who could run longer than their enemy. As for understanding the merits of a battle, it was simple. That was the only variation. Staying alive that long was because of “Running”.

Needless thoughts slowly disappeared.

Hesitation and doubt disappeared. Regrets from the past, and indecisiveness about the future also disappeared.

Forward. Forward. Forward.

He was approaching the landmark which was a grotesque shrub. It would be 10 kilometers according to the map. The distance he had not reached yesterday he had already passed today.

His whole body was in pain, as usual.

However, tomorrow he would be running further.

“You still plan to move, huh? Good gracious, really....”

Michael Lemon said from behind Sousuke.

He was heading towards the Athletic Field, returning to camp.

They were in the northern part of the swampy area in Florida, North America.

It was around a few good 10 kilometers to the nearest community, Taylor Town. Those who went there were mostly hunters, academic researchers, or those who were curious. There were not many visits in the span of a year. There was only one land route. The people going to that remote place could only go through Taylor Town. In other words, if anyone were looking for Sousuke the people in the city would immediately inform Lemon through the wireless radio.

In the attack at Havi Oa Island Lemon’s own organization, the DGSE, had been caught in the information net of Amalgam

without their knowledge. If not, the whereabouts of Sousuke would not have leaked.

He thought of going back to his home country, France. But, thinking of the current situation, it would be dangerous. And then there was Sousuke himself. Lemon's superiors had decided to separate him from his former self. Naturally, this would be severe questioning, or rather, them profiting from their "collaboration" with Sousuke. That attack was obviously a hostile action from Amalgam. His own country and organization thought about the possibility of reconciliation with Amalgam, but Lemon did not agree with that option.

That was why he took only his trusted companions and brought Sousuke to that peculiar place. Because his immediate superior, Delecour, had died, Lemon was entrusted to have his own discretion. His decision would put him in a grave position in his own organization. He had not told his organization where he had gone because the information leak could have already reached the highest levels. Suffice to say, Lemon and the others were running away together with Sousuke.

Does he mind? that's what Lemon wondered.

Of course he moved for the national interest of his own country, and he still intended to do so. He should have handed Sousuke over to the hands of the enemy- or given in to the bigwigs in charge of information from headquarters. Wouldn't his action of running away instead be likened to selling off his own country? To that degree the organization called Amalgam was dangerous. Its roots were spread all over the place, even in his own organization. That was what he had come to realize based on the incidents in the past few months.

First, Sousuke must recover.

If he got back his natural strength, he would become a soldier that would not need guarding. That would let them move easily, and, building a relationship of joint struggle with Sousuke, they would be able to get near the center of the organization called Amalgam. But also, it would take the threat of the enemy away from his native country.

Before going to the camp, Lemon had a talk with Sousuke about what he thought, and asked for his cooperation. Sousuke thought about it and nodded.

“Okay. However, would that be all?” he had asked.

Rational logic aside, Lemon had this feeling of going against Amalgam with prejudice. It was the most extreme subject. If it was up to a “Bureaucratic” agent, this important burden would be pushed to someone in headquarters, and they would transfer him to another assignment.

“Revenge- although it is a strange talk. Well, I do have that mood” Lemon had answered with an absentminded tone.

“Is that so? I understand.”

With only that, Sousuke consented, and he didn’t inquire about Lemon’s motive a second time. As far as information concerning Mithril and Amalgam, and also the circumstances as to why Sousuke was being targeted by the enemy, Sousuke had promised to tell Lemon once he had recovered to a certain degree.

The problem was how to hide from them.

Lemon had reached out to a number of people from his connections. Either way, in terms of safety, there were only difficult places and environments.

Sousuke himself had proposed to Lemon that it should be somewhere difficult.

“There is a person who can lend a hand” he had said.

What that person, John George Courtney, offered was the remote and uninhabited camp.

Even right then Sousuke was leaping and splashing silently in the field, rising and running down. The middle aged person, Courtney, sat down beside Lemon, who was observing silently. The wrinkles of his age were carved, and his movements were reassuring. With an appearance of a veteran, his sweat-colored olive green fatigues were magnificently worn.

“He looks like he’s doing it.”

“Yeah. There’s a degree of recklessness though.”

At Lemon’s words, Courtney let out a “*hmp*” with his nose.

“However, his youth can overlook the recklessness. Do you understand that?”

“Will to fight, or a purpose?”

“Much more simple. Just Fucking Guts” said the old man, combing his abundant mustache with his fingertips.

“Guts, you say...”

“No. Fucking Guts” Courtney corrected.

“Is that different?”

“Don’t you understand? Then you are nothing more than a Fucking Idiot! Well a Fucking French bastard being more sensible in Fucking English, there is still some promise!”

“Uhh-”

The retired Commander Courtney, who used the F-word excessively, was an American who was over 60 and had come back from Vietnam. Preparing the land and camp, setting up the allies in Taylor Town, all of it was due to his assistance.

In the past, with the American Army and Navy being troubled with the guerilla attacks in Vietnam, that camp was established to train in jungle and wetlands combat. A

commissioned officer in the army nicknamed it “Charging Charlie”. It was created to give a personal experience of the Hell of Vietnam to young soldiers who had no knowledge of conventional warfare. Courtney was one of the participants in the training curriculum. The language at that camp was violent; and waking up with bombs in the morning, or with officers wearing the Vietcong uniform, or with not enough time for sleep everyday and having to go creeping in the field was common. Nevertheless, that “Charging Charlie” was established into the “Delta Force” of the Army.

In the spite of being a camp with such a history, Sousuke continued his training rehabilitation.

But Courtney and Sousuke had only met once that year, they only had a relationship through a drinking party thrown by his “superior”. And with only that kind of relationship, that old man had prepared a thorough program. At one point a doubtful Lemon had asked Courtney about his reasons.

“It is because he was chosen by the cute daughter of my friend...” he had muttered lonesomely.

No matter what strange circumstances had occurred, Lemon no longer inquired about it after hearing that kind of sullen reaction.

With that reason alone, everything was prepared by that old man-

“But Mr. Courtney. There is a suitable theory for the training.”

With the only word from Courtney being that Sousuke needed “Guts” Lemon offered his opinion.

“He is obviously over-working it. His physiological movements are wrong. There are not enough muscles attached. Rather, he lost weight; he should have already collapsed when he reached his limits. Didn’t you also say this to Sousuke?”

Then Courtney reached into his breast pocket, pulled out a cigar, and lit it with a match that had been glued to the sleeve of his uniform. It was an impressive way of doing it. After lighting the cigar in front of Lemon, who was still waiting for an answer, he held it to his mouth a couple of times and smoothly blew out some smoke.

“Um, are you listening?”

With smoke blowing, the old soldier finally looked at him and said, “Of course I’m listening. Physiological movements huh?”

“Yeah”

“Fine. I will advise him.”

After saying that he took one step forward. In the crudely made field Sousuke toiled, dripping with sweat.

“Sarge!” he called towards Sousuke.

“Sir!” Sousuke answered with wild breathing.

“Your pace is falling! Really, coming to a health resort searching for boys, you’re showing a shameful ass like an unsatisfied young lady! Could it be that you’re seducing me with that ass!?”

“No sir!”

“Actually you really don’t have the will to do it right!? You’re only showing an appearance of doing your best!”

“No sir!”

“Then put out more fighting spirit! If your thinking of having your rotten dick penetrate the pussy of the girl you’ve fallen for- Move! Move! Move!”

“Yes Sir!”

Raising his voice, Sousuke returned to the task that had been whipping his whole body.

Retired Commander Courtney hurled jeers like “that’s right, Suffer! Writhe!” after him.

“What about the physiological movement theory-” Lemon protested with a fed up face.

“It’s a Fucking theory!” the old soldier growled.

Unintentionally scowling at Lemon, he inhaled his cigar once again and blew out enough smoke to obscure his face. From there he “*Kah-, Peh*” and coughed up a large chunk of phlegm on the ground.

“Discussion of guts is old? Method of training Physiology? Those things are for shitty young ones. Those are said by people who underestimate a man’s life force.”

“Tha...”

“You’re isolated in the middle of combat!” Courtney interrupted. “There are only enemies in the surrounding! If you get caught you lose your life! Your stamina is already at its limit! No water, food or ammunition! What do you do!?”

“.....”

“Well, what? You guys abide by the theory of your doctors, in medical terms you can’t fight anymore, do you give up and blow your head off?”

“That’s...”

“Before that. There is something amazing happening, it’s always before that. Our almighty God has properly prepared for that. God, as we call it, gave man a Super Fucking Charger.”

Courtney firmly made a fist from his grip, hitting Lemon in the chest and looking around.

“Using this, the coward becomes courageous, changing from useless to elite. Not to mention, a common soldier who is on the verge of dying in a short time- he would be able to do this.”

It’s reckless, Lemon thought while knitting his brow.

Moderate exercise and moderate rest. And having a balanced diet. To be able to create an ideal body, those cannot be missed and were scientifically made clear.

“You don’t trust me?”

“Yeah, well...”

“Then I’ll give you proof. Hey, you! You shitty young guy! Come here!”

Courtney called at a soldier doing maintenance in the corner of the camp- the voice reached a Special Forces member, one of Lemon’s subordinates. The soldier, with a dubious face saying, “*me?*” pointed to himself, and ran towards Lemon. Courtney hit his back and pointed towards Sousuke.

“Get him some fighting spirit. Hit him two or three times, and pound him to the ground. What, you don’t have to be forgiving. Go!” he said.

The large built and robust soldier inquired at Lemon’s expression. Lemon thought a little, and gave a short nod indicating “*do as he says*”.

“Then, I’ll do as you say....”

The soldier shrugged his shoulders, and headed toward the center of the field where Sousuke was running. With fist tucked in he informed him, “don’t think of this badly”, which could be heard from where Lemon and Courtney were watching.

“Well, take a look. Take a look at the counterattack that will open your eyes.”

Courtney, with the cigar in mouth, folded his arms in confidence.

The soldier casually hit Sousuke.

Two hits. Three hits.

The extremely fatigued Sousuke was not able to give any kind of resistance. He took a shoulder throw and hit the mud with

his back. Sousuke seemed unable to move and was just facing upwards at the soldier. The soldier looked down at him and shouted back over to Lemon.

“He fainted.”

“.....”

The soldier nursed the confused Sousuke. Lemon let out a sigh and looked at Courtney, who appeared as if nothing had happened and blew out smoke from his cigar.

“Well, this could also happen.” the old soldier said shortly.

“Anyway, you can’t pamper a man. That is vital. Stained with mud, with the sweat flowing freely the current of combat is not to be taken that lightly.”

“Of course.”

Courtney threw his cigar on the ground and extinguished the fire with the heel of his jungle boots.

“But, Mr. young-guy, a man who isn’t smeared with mud and sweat, blood and tears, what would he be capable of then?”



Sitting on a deck chair in the shadows of the terrace watching the day ascend by the sea; that was the daily routine of Chidori Kaname.

Even on rainy days it was the same.

She had only ever been to the sea a few times a year in her life. This was the first time that she had been able to continually look at the same sea for a number of months.

After being separated in Tokyo she was taken to many different places. The most recent place she had been taken to was a mansion on the beach. She was in a situation where she could wander the premises unrestricted. She was told by Leonard, the

person who brought her there, that she could ask the people working in the mansion for whatever she wanted.

“You think I would be happy being treated like a princess?” Kaname had asked.

Leonard had only shrugged his shoulders.

When he arrived at the mansion that day, he had left her and went away in a helicopter. Being the manager of Amalgam, there would be a lot of work to be done. He only returned about once a week. Aside from that he was always out to somewhere.

Even though he had once stolen her lips and said, “I love you”, Leonard did not treat her as his own. He never even embraced or touched her.

Not even using that “resonance”.

He only made her important by secluding her. Like an important gem in a strong box.

Kaname had not been expecting that.

For a young man who apparently had eccentric feelings of love it was very different behavior from what she had been anticipating. He simply had her “do this here” and gave her projects to work on. She wasn’t even thrown into some strange research laboratory. Excluding the house arrest, Kaname was surly free to do as she pleased. She was being treated like a VIP in an extravagant hotel.

After a few weeks of living in the mansion, Leonard gave her a notebook PC that was fairly new and said, “If you are bored, try to thinker with this.”

The PC had its network functions disabled, but stored within it were the design and combat data of a super weapon. It was filled with super important ridiculously classified information.

There was a number of data on varieties of Codarl type and Behemoth type ASes with a Lambda Driver equipped.

Unfortunately there was no information on the Belial, which Leonard used.

Among the combat data it included the battles with Sousuke's Arbalest. There were many pilots for the Codarl type, but the only one who could draw out the full power of the unit was the terrorist who fought with Sousuke, Gauron. Even without the function of the Lambda Driver, he freely controlled the unit with perception and experience. In other words, he was very good at thoroughly harassing the Arbalest. Kaname thought again about the fierceness of the real power of Sousuke that was comparable to Gauron.

There was also combat data about Mao and Kurz's unit, the M9, but those were ordinary. The M9 would be completely crushed with the passengers dying. If an ordinary AS fought with an AS equipped with a Lambda Driver it would not be odd for it to receive that amount of damage. Looking at the combat data, at Sousuke and the others' stubbornness, was telling her of their shrewdness.

If you look at it oppositely, in other words looking from the perspective of Amalgam, the situation was somewhat of an irritation.

Even against hardware guaranteed to be far superior, these enemies would not yield. Mobilizing with experience and skill, elasticity and unpolished intuition, in the end they continued to resist. Finally they would find an opportunity and the Lambda Driver equipped unit would succumb to a fatal counterattack. That might probably be the "Difference in skill". Mao, Kurz and the others, ordinary youths who were flawed with human weakness, at the same time were like polished fighting machines. That fact appeared in numerical values on the screen.

Kaname, looking at that data, vaguely guessed the meaning in what Leonard had once said, “*Mithril is trying too hard*”.

Amalgam was felt as a threat to Sousuke and the others.

She roughly scanned the design data of the Codarl and Behemoth. With Kaname’s intelligence the way it was just then she easily discovered the point of the problem. The appearance of the original pattern had been derived from Leonard, many of the other portions seemed to have been handled by engineers.

The Lambda Driver equipped ASes of Amalgam required the operator to take medications prior to starting up the equipment. This created a variety of “Static stimulations”, producing a peculiar electrical pattern in the brain. It was only a shell of an interface which was called TAROS, the unit amplifying that “power”. It could not be asserted with the design data alone, but the medications that the amalgam pilots used had been improving. Close to one year ago, when they had met that unstable boy, Takuma, the medications caused them to behave erratically. The combat data from that incident was missing, but the pilots of the Codarls right now were not as emotionally unstable as Takuma.

The fundamental principle of the Codarl’s Lambda Driver was most probably the same as the Arbalest, but Sousuke did not require any medication. Over time Sousuke and the Arbalest had exhibited a dramatic battle, a mental state which could not be reproduced by a medicine prescription. It was probably brought forth by the concentration and strong will he had forged by living as a soldier from such a young age. A variation of enhanced feeling was a plus.

Although the Arbalest was unstable, it had an overwhelming strength in a complete situation. The Codarl type exhibited stable functioning and the specifications were also available with limited mass production. But it could not exhibit the

instant strength of the Arbalest. To say it simply, the Codarl was a unit for exterminating ordinary AS, whereas the Arbalest was designed to fight with an AS equipped with a Lambda Driver. The difference was also clearly shown in the combat data.

It was strange to say, but the Codarl and Behemoth units were somewhat similar. But their similarities were also their limitations. They did not take into consideration that an enemy may also be equipped with a Lambda Driver. Many aspects of their design had been sacrificed in order to accommodate the complex system. In addition, the expansion of their protective wall was difficult. Being defeated by a common AS would not be impossible if an enemy was familiar with the Lambda Driver equipment, in other words Tessa and the others.

Even with a supernatural energy field generating device they were not invincible.

At Kaname's diagnosis, the "Battle ratio" of a Lambda Driver equipped AS and an ordinary 3rd generation AS, with the same skill in pilots, would be assumed around 8 to 1. If 8 of the M9s were drilled with the proper countermeasures, they could defeat a single unit of Codarl. Of course the side with the M9s would pay a suitable sacrifice, actual tactics were much more complex and organic, but if simplified that would be it.

If compared to the tanks and anti tank helicopters that were used in current warfare, an extreme example, the ratio would be 16 to 1. Comparing that to the existence of the Lambda Driver boarded AS would not cause a dramatic change in the concern of the people. Although this might not be a big thing if looking at the history of science, on top of the military history the artillery and communication system, ICBM, would have a greater incidence.

Was it expected in this world that people had noticed as much? Most probably only a handful of people had- him, herself

and Tessa, and a few more people who were the same as them. People like Mao and the others, who had experienced it in actual combat, might have already noticed it too.

Looking at the collected data in the Notebook PC, Kaname understood that much.

Leonard had made her understand that truth. And then, on top of that he had asked her, “Then how do you use this worthless equipment called Lambda Driver? How would you repair this unit?”

In any case, Kaname increased the radiation cord from the head part from one to two, making three knots of ribbon to create a data transfer.

“Your friend will be alright.”

It was about Tokiwa Kyouko. After saying that Leonard had smiled and said, “why don’t you try redoing it”, and returned the data to her.

After that, Kaname once in a while thought of a design plan and handed it to Leonard’s subordinates. Her design plans were merely sketches with no real practical uses. The contents were just for Leonard. She would purposely mix in the wrong numerical values and a mechanism with contradicting specs resulted. It would be an ingenious trap that would be difficult for an ordinary engineer to notice. With the discomfort of having her skills tested, she also tried to test the observer. Of course Leonard would have noticed that intention. He would simply show her the mistaken passage, shrug his shoulders, and leave.

How long would she be staying in that mansion?

What did they want with her?

Leonard talked about a lot of things. Not only the management of the organization, but she felt the impression that he was preparing for something very big. Most probably, until that day came she would have to be in that place.

After losing the livelihood of Tokyo, Kaname, who felt she had thrown away something, had no more spirit to inquire about those matters.

Whatever. That was what she thought.

Anger and laughter, she could no longer recall. Only knowing of living in that mansion, becoming a middle aged woman, becoming an elderly woman, and dying someday. She thought that that would be good.

That place was in the subtropics.

It had already been warm since February, with only the broadleaf trees remaining in sight. There were no roads or houses seen on the premises, not even a ship going back and forth on the coast. Nor an Aircraft. The helicopter for people to visit the mansion was the only thing that ever flew there.

It was a quiet place.

Like the silence of her heart right then, it was a hollow place.

The sun set just like how it always did, so she left the terrace. Then she walked to the west side of the wide garden. That had become a daily routine for Kaname.

It was a garden that was well maintained. In that season the light purple Jacaranda flowers were blooming. Shining under the velvet sunset sky of dusk, they left an absentminded and gloomy color around them. A gentle sea breeze came from the sea, shaking the leaves of the garden, and a number of whispers reached her ears.

Hearing that conversation, on that evening, she backed into the corner of the garden.

One was a man, the other was a woman.

“...and then? The escape from LA was really uncertain right?”

She knew that voice well. Leonard's subordinate Lee Fowler.

A handsome man with black hair that would leave a woman enthralled. She didn't know what kind of past he had, but behind the gentleman-like demeanor was a capable soldier with careful characteristics; he was a man who hid his discernment. He was disciplined to have absolute loyalty to Leonard, and was very polite to Kaname. He seemed to be the right hand of Leonard and flew around the world, but on that day he was visiting the mansion.

"Yes. How unfortunate."

The voice of the woman who answered Fowler was also known to Kaname. Sabina Refunio. It was a conversation between Leonard's subordinates after all.

The woman, who essentially managed the people who worked in the mansion, always wore a black suit and black rimmed glasses. Her appearance looked somewhat young. Probably around her 20's. Or possibly at an age that was no different from Kaname's.

Sabina was always in the mansion, there were many chances of meeting her. She was also polite towards Kaname, always respectful no matter what time.

However, she was not just a weak girl. And did not only work as a steward. She also communicated and led different people outside of the organization. At that young age. On the opposite side of that courteous conduct there was a scent from somewhere- of one who had an occupation fighting. That silent tension could also be felt.

Even the people who worked in the mansion occasionally showed fear towards Sabina.

These two confidants and subordinates of Leonard, what were they whispering about in the corner of the garden? Because

she had the feeling she might fall asleep she might have cut off her consciousness and erased her presence. Fowler and Sabina didn't seem to notice her presence at all.



LA- the retreat from Los Angeles, she really didn't understand.

She didn't know who, but the two were talking about someone.

"Did you tell Master Leonard about this? With your judgment you dispatched an assassination team to Havi Oa Island. That operation ended in failure. In addition you lost sight of that man."

"Of course I told him." Sabina answered with a very calm voice.

"About the secrecy, that person is predictable."

"What is he?"

"Nothing. That's rather a word of appreciation."

"What a lenient person."

"What do you mean?"

"I think it was not a mystery to have angered Master Leonard. Certainly the handling of that unit was only an example of a pilot. However, for arguments sake even if the ARX system were to be rebuilt, the Belial would still be unrivaled. It is not a situation that should be feared."

"I don't think so."

There was a hidden implication in the uncharacteristic words of Sabina.

"Even with his defeat?"

"No. Of course he is not invincible. In fact, I think my Eligor would be enough to deal with him."

"Then why did you try to assassinate him?"

"I thought that it would not be necessary to have a fair fight. It is best to pinch the troubling sprout early on."

Fowler let out a small sigh.

“That would be the extreme right. But you don’t understand right? You may have hurt the pride of that person.”

“In other words, about her?”

“That’s right.”

Kaname would need a little more time before she realized who the word “Her” meant that Sabina was referring to.

“But Master Leonard no longer concerns himself with that man. It’s like if a paper napkin fell to the floor while eating, I would pick it up and throw it away- that is all.”

“I see. Thinking just like a lady.”

“Is that so?”

“No, excuse me. ...in any event, there is no longer a need for assassination.”

“And why is that?”

“We caught the news of the ARX unit that disappeared in Tokyo. It is not complete but three Codarl M types were ordered to capture it. We will finally see the skills of Mister Kalium.

“Would that not hurt the self-esteem of Master Leonard?”

Fowler snorted his nose.

“That’s why it was to be ‘Captured’. We can do whatever we want after. We can also have the permission.”

“I understand.”

“Anyway, as for the remains of Mithril, we don’t want to be sorry for the difficulty they may cause. I think we should focus on this plan.”

“Of course.”

“Then, best regards.”

Fowler and Sabina parted in that place, heading in different directions.

Kaname had calmly listened to that conversation. She did not stir or even show any sense of tension, just like the sound of

the wind. If she were still the energetic girl of long ago, drawing her breath from an inner strength, Fowler might have noticed her existence.

Havi Oa Island.

Assassination Team.

ARX System.

Project.

Those words did not much move her heart. The problem was “that man”- about Sousuke.

Since Fowler was no longer there, how long, then, had she been there? Kaname, in the darkness under the shade of the tree, without speaking to anyone, muttered a soft whisper.

“That idiot....”

He was alive. And also, she didn’t know what things he was doing, but he seemed to be continuing to do something that Amalgam didn’t like.

Probably, searching for her.

To bring her back to the quadrangle of that school.

Going that far to destroy her current lifestyle, unyielding, not even raising the white flag. What did he think he was doing?

That idiot.

For me. In a situation like that... me, who betrayed you right in front of you when you were on the verge of death. Me, who threw you away and went with another man.

That idiot-

There were no tears. She was utterly amazed from the bottom of her heart.

Not at him. But at herself.

What exactly was she doing?

At that rate, inside that boring mansion, she would become an old lady. She had even been thinking that it would be good to

die like that. Without anything. Without hurting anyone. What would be her atonement for that? Kicking him with meager sarcasm- that was all.

That idiot-

Leave me alone. Forget about me. Slowly, find another way of life. Why do you have to trouble yourself for me?

That idiot-

Hurry up and come here. Do it and come here. Say to me the usual words. With a blunt sullen face, say “No problem”.

No.

You can't. It's full of problems.

The darkness of the tree shade was the best place to space out.

That idiot-

She couldn't stand herself. Cowardly. Really cowardly. Clinging on to her miserable feelings, she cowered there for a number of minutes.

When she felt the chill of the night atmosphere, she finally stood up. Walking out of the garden with her weak feet, she headed to her own room in the mansion. To the big bed. She thought that it would be comfortable to just sleep there.

But before entering the mansion, she noticed something. In front of the south side, there was a 25 meter clean pool. She had not even swam once.

“.....”

She stopped her in her tracks, gazing at the pool for a while. With the illumination leaking from the window of the mansion, the surface of the water shimmered. She stared at it with her indifferent eyes.

Shall we take a swim? she vaguely thought.

Rather, she thought to sink into the middle of the water, and just disappear like that. No, if she were to jump into the pool, she wouldn't be committing suicide. Even then, without knowing the reason herself, she walked to the pool side.

She took off her heeled sandals and entered the pool barefooted.

Cold.

A flavor not found those past few months, she felt the strange freshness of it.

No one was looking in the surrounding area.

Kaname sat in the pool with her clothes on, playing in the cold water with both of her feet for a while, then dipped her whole body under.

Cold.

The dress she was wearing was gently spread in the water, and every time she moved her heavy body it coiled around her. With gloominess she cast it off in the middle of the pool. Her body has somewhat become lighter.

In only her underwear, she looked upwards and floated above the water, splashing in the silence. Looking at the night sky. Countless stars were twinkling in front of her eyes. And then, she tried to truly swim.

She slowly kicked her foot, raising her face and swimming forward. She was progressing in the water. She was no longer in a bad mood, the cold temperature of the water was frivolous in her breath.

Shall she swim faster?

She came to a crawl. With a strong thud of her leg, both hands mutually paddled the water. Speeding up, the striking of the water echoed in the empty pool.

Shall she swim faster?

Why didn't she try?

She was faster than she thought. With the strength of her arms and legs, her body continuously progressed.

What's this? Not bad.

She finally pulled out her strength. She neared the end of the pool. She touched the wall, made a quick turn, and swam back the 25 meters.

Without any profound reason, she continued to swim. Like embroidery in the water, it was not a beautiful swimming style. But more like swimming with ones might. Beating on the water, a violent kick in the air, swimming like a body violently twisting. Her breathing became heavy and rough all at once; she did not mind and continued to swim.

And then forward. And then forward.

She made a number of round trips in the pool. Why was she doing it, she herself did not know.

At any rate she wanted to swim. Moving all her body, moving forward.

Forward. Forward. Forward.

Due to a number of months without exercise, she got tired immediately. It was hard. It was difficult to breath. The muscles here and there were screaming.

Even then she swam.

Forward! Forward! Forward!

Beating the water in the dim light, raising a small roar, she continued to swim. Really not pretty, a movement like an octopus trying to drown something. Raising her face from the surface water, she continued forward.

Swim! Swim! Swim!

The water's coldness must have gone somewhere. Now it was hot. If she struck, the water drops would dance in the air. She

was somehow in a mood to smile. The hardship of her whole body turned into a sensation. Even though it was hard, her heart was released somewhere.

Aah, that's right.

Together with her nostalgic sensation, she thought about it. She thought too much.

Hesitation and difficulty would not start anything. No, there was no longer any need for that, but there was something much more important.

Namely.

Swimming, walking, moving forward. She might be tired in half a day.

Even then, swimming like this is not bad.

Forward more! Forward more!

Continuing to swim like that- she did not even know how many rounds she made. If she kept it up she might drown in her own feelings, and so Kaname finally stopped. At the time that she crawled up from the pool side, there was a feeling that steam was rising from all over her body.

Staggering while standing, there was someone at her back who called out a voice.

“This is rare”

It was Sabina. It was because she had been swimming loudly that it was bound to be noticed.

“Is that so?”

Tearing off her shoulders with a breath, Kaname exchanged words with her. It was good to feel her heartbeat beating loudly. She casually lifted herself out of the pool, paying no attention to the wetness of her form or how she might look to someone of the opposite sex.

“It feels good. How about you?”

Like challenging her, Kaname spoke with her eyes glaring. Sabina shrugged her shoulders a little.

“No. But seeing you energetic would be good.”

“I wonder. This is still the worst.”

“Indeed.”

Sabina carefully looked at Kaname with deep eyes, and said, “It seems that you’ve heard, right?”



Forward! Forward! Forward! Swimming, running, moving forward. Certainly there were problems. She could not necessarily last forever, but still... In any case, forward. Forward. Forward.

With only that, she understood that she was talking about what was overheard in the garden. She didn’t know how she knew, but Sabina had noticed it.

Kaname quickly responded.

“Yeah, I heard. Sorry.”

“Then you knew? I tried to kill your boyfriend.”

“Not particularly. Isn’t that alright?”

Kaname laughed with her nose.

“Or what I mean is, he’s not my boyfriend in the first place. But that guy, he won’t be killed by the likes of you. Isn’t that just overly self consciousness? We took your most important thing, sorry, AND I’m cool, right?”

Sabina just stood there with her expressionless face.

“....It’s about time for dinner. Shall I accompany you to the dining hall?”

“Since it’s troublesome I’ll pass” Kaname said carelessly.

“But-”

“If you want me to go no matter what, then prepare Lake Fish made Koshihikari and some Nattou. Aah, and then-I want to eat some Dried Round Herring. Thanks.”

Sabina who wasn’t quite familiar with customary Japanese food, asked again for the names of the ingredients.

Certainly there were a lot of problems.

But she couldn’t possibly continue on like she had been.

That was why in the mean time, forward. Forward. Forward.



When the former Mithril Information Department Hong Kong Branch head Gavin Hunter and the others were attacked, they were passing through the streets of Cantwell going 60 kilometers per hour. While still working on the frame work of the “Unit” they had frantically run away from Anchorage, heading straight for the workshop which they had prepared beforehand. They were attacked along the way.

It was dawn and raining. There were evergreen trees all around the area.

Although it was already June, the mornings of Alaska were still unpleasantly cold. There were two trailers holding the unit. Hunter was on the passenger side of the leading car. Unlike the route other convoys used at night, it was a place where no cars were going back and forth.

There was an ambush waiting for them.

In the path of their way there was a bluish phosphorescence floating in the air; at once a giant appeared. It was an Arm Slave. In addition it was not that one unit alone. There was also another behind Hunter and the others. And then 300 meters from the left, on a small hill, was another unit. As far as they could see, there were three units. From the silhouette they could see the distinct feature of the diamond-shaped head. The three units were all made up of Codarl types. Since they only had one armored troop resistance was futile.

The Codarl in front opened his hands and said “Stop”

“Do as he says. Stop.” Hunter said towards the driver who looked blankly when the AS suddenly appeared. The driver was employed locally and was an outsider, of course he would have no knowledge of what the contents were.

The two trailers stopped in the middle of the road, the external speakers of the Codarl said.

“Cut your engine and come out with both your hands up. If you resist we will shoot.”

They obeyed.

From the thicket on the left side of the road appear five or six men. They immediately grasped the necks of Hunter and the others and lined them up in a row beside the trailer. Although wearing civilian clothes, they carried submachine guns and their movements and cooperation were tightly controlled. If there had

been any kind of resistance, the members were in a good firing position. There was no mistake that they were professionals.

The drivers were frightened. Hunter pitied them for involving them. But he had anticipated that situation and had employed outsiders. He didn't want to expose his subordinates, with high skills and experience, to unnecessary dangers- in other words, if the employed drivers happened to be killed it would not damage them greatly.

Then, why was he going along with them?

There were a number of logical reasons. He made calculations not to get himself killed, and to shift to escape if somehow captured. For arguments sake, if he died there were no people who would be concerned. His relationship with his loving wife in Hong Kong had become a catastrophe when Mithril collapsed.

Oh well. Being a woman who had pride being a former model, up hers. To be with a small fat person like him, she had only wanted a Grand Cinq ring...that's what he thought.

But the largest and most dangerous risk he took was not to be in agreement with the enemy.

"Gavin Hunter right?"

One of the attackers said without negligence of his gun. It was meaningless if he were to deny this, so Hunter gave his affirmation. But even then, the enemy had made deep preparations.

"Say your mother's name and you birthday"

So they were watching out for his substitute. He had difficulty with his memory- and his mother had died 20 years earlier. He answered the question.

"Debbie. June 4"

"Alright. Show me the load. Open it with the key you have."

Whether it was a form of protest or something else, Hunter hesitated. Wouldn't it be alright to irritate them for a bit? No, that attitude would rather give suspicion to his enemies. He rethought, and calmly replied "I understand". Raising both his hands he walked towards the rear of the trailer. There were two armed men, following him from behind.

No matter how he struggled, he could not resist. They were much more trained. They were men armed with automatic rifles, and had three Lambda Driver equipped ASes. But Hunter knew some much more stubborn professionals- those guys from the West Pacific Fleet. They would not lose to these guys.

Removing the lock on the rear doors, the boorish metal fittings were unfastened. He opened the double doors and inside was a large quantity of cardboard boxes.

"It's smoked salmon." Hunter said.

"We got it cheap from a trader. We plan on traveling along like this crossing Canada towards Utah--"

Not listening to his words, the man violently pulled down the cardboard boxes. The cardboard boxes fell to the ground and from the smashed boxes smoke salmon was revealed in vacuum packs. Hunter, who was looking on, was in a mood to drink some beer.

"Keep quiet and just watch."

There were several cardboard boxes; inside them were a number of curved armor pieces. A part of a large machine appeared.

People in the military field would understand immediately. It was the head of a 3rd generation AS.

"Are these smoked salmon?" the man snorted, and called on the digital communicator he had.

“This is Blue One. We have discovered Tango One. Blue One will proceed with Alpha protocol. There is a control on Tango Four. Request instructions- Blue One Roger”

The man concluded the communication and ordered the attackers to withdraw.

At once, two large helicopters equipped with ECS appeared, hovering in the skies about 10 meters away, dropping a sturdy wire and hook. The men on the ground quickly acted and connected the wire to the trailer.

And then another small helicopter flew over. It was an old model Gazelle. The small helicopter landed with rhythmical movement, around 30 meters away from the trailer.

A large built man in civilian clothes got off from the small helicopter.

Taking off the headset and leaving the seat, with an energetic soldier-like gait he headed towards them. Because of the shadow created by the trees, the face of the man was not clearly visible. His gray coat fluttered in the wind. His hair and beard were also gray.

One of the attackers raced to the “Gray Man”, bowing his head, reporting to him while not losing to the roaring sound of the helicopter. Most probably that man was the commander.

After briefly instructing the subordinate, the gray man slowly walked towards Hunter. His height was about 190 centimeters. His age could also be guessed at roughly around his 50's.

“.....?”

The man came walking a few steps forward.

It was a face he knew. And also, a man who should not have been there.

“Impossible. You're...”

“In this industry that is possible.” taking for granted the speechless gaze of Hunter, that man, Andrei Kalinin, said.

“But-”

Hunter was usually a man who would not be surprised, but that was different. It was something that he did not see mistakenly, no matter how many times he thought it.

But it was certain.

Standing over there, the one who was leading the troops of Amalgam, was the Russian who was responsible as the Operations Commander of the Western Pacific Fleet of Mithril, Andrei Kalinin.

He passed beside Hunter, confirming the contents of the trailer.

“This is the aforementioned unit?”

“.....”

“Building something like this, it changes nothing. It was a useless labor.”

Hunter’s fist suddenly gained strength.

“....Mister Kalinin. I didn’t think that such words would come out of your mouth. Although we were not close, we were in numerous operations together. But, I didn’t think you were the kind of person who would say that. Those young fellows trusted you. Is that not reason enough?”

“That’s an overvalue.”

“A lot of your allies were killed! On top of that, what sort of infamy- don’t you at least feel a little pain in your heart!?”

Even with the sharp words of Hunter, Kalinin did not even move his eyebrows.

And then he only said one word.

“Withdraw” he ordered his subordinates.

“Wait, Mister Kalinin. Are you really---”

Hunter approaching defiantly, Kalinin fired his automatic gun casually. He felt a dull pain in his abdomen, and then a burning pain throughout his whole body.

“.....!”

His hands were dyed with blood as he put pressure on the wound. A memory of a quarrel during his poor childhood times in the streets of Glasgow came to his mind. Hunter fell on both his knees, and looked forward. In the corner of his narrowing field of vision, he only saw the wet road and the boots of Kalinin.

“If a human loses roughly around 30 percent of his blood he will die” Kalinin said. “With that bleeding, you need to get emergency treatment within 30 minutes. The nearest medical facility is 63 kilometers from here. We will be withdrawing from here. With luck you could get picked up by a car, but even if you do your best to fly, it would be difficult to make it in time. But my helicopter has the necessary medical kit.”

“.....”

“Then here is the question, Mister Hunter. This unit, the ARX-8, who were the people who constructed it? And where are they?”

Hunter spit at the boots of Kalinin with blood mixed in. It did not fly very well, and fell to the ground.

“Eat shit.”

“Is that so?”

Kalinin did not show even any signs of disappointment.

“Then enjoy your last 30 minutes.”

The fallen Hunter stayed still, and Kalinin left. His subordinates also started to withdraw, leaving the drivers kneeling.

The helicopter in the skies left a fierce roar of the turbo shaft engine. The two trailers hanging on the helicopters started to ascend, climbing the skies and accelerating towards the eastern sky.

The helicopter Kalinin rode started to takeoff, and disappeared immediately.

Once only the three Codarls remained, they lowered their weapons, activated their ECS, and leapt away into the distance. With only a bluish white light remaining, the three units disappeared from the morning atmosphere.

“....how can this be?” Hunter muttered in the returning silence.

The drivers were racing around. They showered him with their worried jeers, but those words no longer reached his ears.

Gentlemen of the Western Pacific Fleet.

With those kinds of toys, ASes equipped with Lambda Drivers, you will be clashing with a tough enemy.



After two days exercising, Sousuke was being evaluated. Lemon's subordinates were the only competitors available, so that was who he was up against.

They selected a search route to try and determine the position of Sousuke's encampment. They crossed at the river because that was the ironclad rule concerning tracking. Though they all had actual combat experience most probably it had not been in such a swampy area.

There were many different variations of large mosquitoes and ants. They smeared their bodies with insecticide, but no matter how many times the wind blew by there was water floating about everywhere. There were only rare traces of man-made things.

But no matter how carefully they erased their footprints, if they didn't carefully avoid the spider's webs in the forest it was like proclaiming "We are going this way".

The team was split into two groups of pursuit, but looking at the terrain, the search radii of the two teams were too far apart. If one side were to enter combat it would take too much time for the support team to turn around. If the four men of one team were taken care of, it would not be difficult to trap the others.

Well, how about time for an emergency...

He had gambled on that.

Sousuke was waiting for them to drop their concentration, and then he would attack. Following the traces of a meal he had purposefully left they reached the roots of a big tree. The point man had noticed the traces and the tail of the team was creeping up from the left wing. Just as he considered the possibility that the traces may have been left on purpose he was grabbed from behind. Without making a sound he was grappled to the ground and a knife was pressed to the nape of his neck.

“You’re dead” Sousuke whispered in the man’s ear before disappearing.

The remaining enemy was only eight meters away, but the thick bush interrupted his field of vision.

From there on it was difficult.

Sousuke moved forward and, turning from the left wing, got close to the enemy. The first person who felt the presence of “Murder” called out in warning to his surrounding comrades who were further along the path.

It was impossible to kill the opponents he was practicing with without making a sound.

With that judgment, he put away his knife and took out his sub-machine gun; he pushed towards the enemy at once. He was still hidden, but the enemy was only a few steps ahead of him. He was aiming his gun towards Sousuke. Sousuke fired first. The sound of gunfire resounded in the jungle. The paint bullet coming

out of the weak cartridge hit the enemy's chest and head. They caused a suitable amount of pain, and the opponent who got attacked cried out.

“Uoh, that hurts!”

“A corpse should sleep.”

Sousuke immediately moved. The two remaining men, who heard the gunfire and screams, reacted and headed for the bush. Sousuke fired without delay. The successive gunfire echoed in the surroundings.

If they had been real bullets, they would have pierced the leaves and headed his way. Sousuke would have died. But unfortunately, the reduced gunpowder of the paint bullets did not have the destructive power to penetrate the thick bush. In addition the opponents were not able to get a foothold in the zone, and moving was a curse. On the other hand Sousuke had grasped the terrain from walking about the night before. Even if he ran with his eyes closed he would remember it. He could win, even if it was two on one.

Although he felt it was sly, Sousuke skillfully took care of the remaining two. As expected the four men complained.

“Why don't you just quietly die”, his voice showed the excitement of having successfully lain his trap.

Twenty minutes after the first gunshots were heard, the other four man team finally came.

Five minutes after that, everyone was “Killed in action”. They were all discontent with Sousuke after all.



After the exercise, Sousuke and the other members returned to camp, Lemon and Courtney were in front of the electric fan and were caught in the middle of a game of chess.

“That’s why! I did not cheat!”

“No! It’s definitely a FUCKING Cheat! My Pawn was not there a while ago! You must have moved it while I was shitting! You cheating bastard!”

“Let me tell you, I have an IQ of 150 and graduated at Sorbonne. I’m a little intelligent and also young. There’s no reason why I should lose to an eccentric old man like you! Please stop saying strange things!”

“How dare you say such things! My Uncle died in Omaha Beach. We save you weak French Bastards from FUCKING Hitler!”

“Haa! Then my ancestors gave weapons as presents to the poor people in the new continent 200 years ago!”

“That’s a lie! Definitely a lie!”

“You were also lying weren’t you?”

“What was that? If you want proof then I have some! The picture of the house in Arizona at that time- damn, wait until tomorrow! I’m going to go back and get it!”

Was he seriously going 2500 kilometers to Arizona? Eventually the two of them noticed Sousuke and the others.

“Hn. What’s the matter with you?”

“The exercise had ended. All 8 men were defeated” said the Team Leader’s Warrant Officer.

Courtney’s eyes widened.

“Hohou? That’s astounding. So we were training for that. You’ve really been wiped out by Sagara.”

“No. If it were a real combat I would have been killed when I took down 3 men. I’m not yet back to normal condition.” Sousuke denied.

He took out his belt kit, magazines, and communicators and started their maintenance.

“What an extreme confidence” Lemon muttered, gazing at the back of Sousuke, who was efficiently lining up his equipment.

“If you were in normal condition, you are saying that you would have annihilated all 8 of them in a real battle?”

“Affirmative. If I can’t do that at least, I can’t fight with Amalgam” Sousuke answered without any malice.

“That may be true. But, it seems that you are recovering leisurely.”

“Huh?”

“It’s Nickelo. One of the places that you mentioned. Because of that we’ve narrowed it down. This is it.”

On top of the crude desk there was a Notebook PC opened, Lemon displayed a number of diagrams.

It was a satellite image. There was a small town in Pochutla, South of Mexico, on the coast near Nickelo. There were no institutions standing out at first sight, it was a lonely place. Facing the sea was a large mansion.

“It’s a satellite photo from 20 hours ago. Surveillance satellite of NATO---although it is a low resolution type, we managed to get a photo penetrated.”

“Hm. How handy.” Courtney groaned peeping at the display from the side.

“That’s why I said I was intelligent. I don’t cheat, I can win against you.”

“Shut up. This and that are different!”

Interrupting Lemon's head poking at Courtney, Sousuke inquired.

"And then what about this mansion?"

"This is actually the property of a billionaire. A Mexican called Mendoza who profited from IT. His face shows up once in a while in the Wall Street Journal, he doesn't really use this place much. Yet there are capital funds being carried here. Take notice at the figures in the last year. His contract with the construction company and the agent, and look at the transfer of money in and out of the bank-"

After a little while, Lemon revealed a number of official documents and explained technically. The monetary circulation and laws were terms that Sousuke and the others could not understand.

"In other words?" everyone aside from Lemon who had no idea of how money works said in unison.

Having explained with pride, Lemon slowly answered in a dejected tone.

"In other words- this mansion, in essence, is being used by someone who has not revealed their true self."

"Is it related to Amalgam?"

"This 'Special Seat' is somewhat similar to the program in the outskirts of Namsak, in many different aspects."

"It might be gangs of Drug Cartels."

"Not so. There is too much security for a gang. Magnify the satellite photo."

The mansion was magnified. The blurry form of people could be seen at that resolution.

This time everyone nodded.

"I see. It's secured."

At the very least there were probably sixteen sentries carrying mobile automatic weapons. The others were empty handed giants. There were four units of light-armored vehicles equipped with Heavy Machine Gun Turrets.

“What’s the time frame?”

“Past 17:00 hours. It will be multiplied by dark. Roughly around one platoon. I think we can penetrate it in stealth.”

“Impossible.” Sousuke said.

“These giants walking about as sentries are wearing trench coats. These are not humans. They are super compact Autonomous mobile ASes”

“....these are the robot called Alastors right?”

While living in this camp Sousuke had told them all about Amalgam’s equipment and the details of his combat with them.

-But he had left out everything about Kaname.

“Unless it is a powerfully special warhead or at least a 50 caliber class bullet you cannot take down these opponents. If needed, it will self destruct and scattered ball bearings. My unit also had difficulty with them.”

“Hmm- But, then this is clearly an establishment of Amalgam then.”

“Affirmative. There are still some problems.”

Sousuke pointed at the satellite image.

“There are 6 containers on the premises. They look like storehouses, but they are camouflaged hangars for ASes.”

“What did you say?”

“It’s what Sagara said.”

Courtney nodded.

“I saw this before at the weapons show in Nevada. The roof opens. Its construction is very similar.”

“That’s it, Lt. Commander. If we were to include the equipment and ammunitions, two containers have one unit. Most probably three units.”

“Hahaa....”

Lemon scratched his temples.

“What about the type of unit? Is it a Savage?”

“If this is an important institution of Amalgam, it won’t be those kinds of easy enemies. It’s probably a Codarl type.”

“Those Lambda Driver equipped ASes...”

“This is too extreme; there is no means of countermeasure. Even if we had several good pilots on M9s, it’s one unit that you can’t easily take down. And we have to be prepared to accept exterior damages.”

A gloomy silence hung over the place.

“I give up. There are three of those monsters; we can’t even lift a finger.”

“If that guy were here, it would not be difficult to take them down....”

“That guy?”

“Al. The only Lambda Driver equipped AS in Mithril’s possession.”

“The 1st generation Al right. The ARX-7.”

Lemon narrowed his eyes in sadness. He must have been thinking about “Al II”, the white Savage that had been left behind in Namsak-

When he thought about his physical and mental condition, the reason why Sousuke was attacked in Havi Oa Island was probably not related to the explosion of the Arbalest in Tokyo. There was no way that repairs could have been made to the destroyed unit. But as for the form of the Lambda Driver system- there was a possibility that the AI included in the core unit could

have survived. And the only one in the world who was capable of operating that system was Sousuke. That would be the only logical reason as to why he was being targeted like a stray dog by Amalgam.

Of course there was the possibility that it was for revenge. He had managed to kill Gauron, Kurama, and a number of other Amalgam members. But he could not think of it like that. It seemed unnatural to purposely set things up with the DGSE and execute that kind of hasty attack.

There might still have been some other reasons.

Do they hate the information threat posed by Lemon? Was their command system in a state of chaos? Was it the individual motive of Leonard Testarossa? Or revenge from the remnants of Gauron and Kurama?

Was all of it intertwined to create a complex and complicated situation?

If he thought about it, there was no end. The initial suggestion, his relationship with Al, was the most fitting.

“....No, it can’t be helped even if we think about a lost unit. Let’s think up a realistic operation.” Sousuke said, throwing out various doubts.

Lemon let out a sigh.

“You say that. With this combat power, attack is impossible. Capturing the managers or the VIP is impossible. These subordinates of mine are important, I don’t want to send them out to face an enemy and not have them return alive.”

“I did not ask you to go that far. I plan to do it alone.”

“Again, you’re still like that- Enough with your lone wolf airs!” Lemon raised his voice and Lt. Commander Courtney knitted his brow.

“Ah- shut up. You shriek like a girl.”

“I’m not screaming!”

“Shut up, you cheating bastard!”

“That’s...”

“The point. We just need to pile them up and deal with those FUCKING ASes one way or another right?”

“Like I said, that’s not possible so it’s difficult!”

“Hmph. No matter what kind of unit it is, if it doesn’t have a pilot then it’s a FUCKING piece of JUNK. We just have to trick the ASes and attack them. Before they move, we FUCK them with a 40mm shell.” Courtney said with a strange confidence.

“An AS. But, I’m currently in a situation where my organization can’t support me. We can’t even get a single AS.”

“Then it would be alright as long as we have an AS?”

“Yeah. We can’t have a piece of junk like that in the countryside of South America or Namsak though.”

“Hmm. Sergeant, what do you think?” Courtney asked Sousuke.

“If it were to be an attack with an AS, we would need a 2nd generation which is a little silent and has maneuverability. Weapons control system and communications systems have to be at least the level of what is currently used. The ability of a comparatively simple to obtain Savage is insufficient.”

After the answer to his question it was clear that there was no way to obtain that kind of AS. They could infiltrate from the sea, they could settle it with C4 explosives. But there was an unreasonable amount of difficulty. There was very little hope for success-

However, Courtney nodded in agreement, alone, and said, “I see. Then we can do it.”

“Huh?”

Then, from far away there was a strange sound echoing. A faint sound of an engine, an intermittent sound chattering the air. It was the sound of an aircraft- a helicopter. And it was getting near the camp.

“It’s here.”

Looking at the dubious faces, Courtney said “follow me” and left the lodging house. Outside, the sound of the helicopter gradually increased and finally transfigured into an exploding sound floating around the camp.

“Mr. Courtney, what is this---”

“Just take a look.”

Leaves flew through in the air, swirling around a thicket across the camp, shaken violently by a strong wind. In that direction the shape of a giant helicopter could be seen.

A box type unit coated in gray. A customized CH-53. A previous generation from the transport aircraft MH-67 Pave Mare which was used by Sousuke while in Mithril. Under the giant helicopter, there was a shadow of an Arm Slave hanging on the wire below it.

It had dark grey armor and solid limbs. Donning a down jacket, it looked like a man with short legs.

It was an M6 Bushnell.

In addition it was an update for the Special Forces with the latest A3 model, a type which was called a “Dark Bushnell”. Although not the next generation M9, it prided itself on its maneuverability, and for a short amount of time it could be silent with an electric driven engine.

It was better than the first model. Obtaining that unit was no simple matter-

“Well, it was easy.” Courtney said to Lemon and the others whose mouths were gaping wide.

“...then you mean, the important matter that you wanted to go to Arizona for was this?”

“Hm, did I say something like that?”

There was a shadow of a man disembarking from inside the helicopter’s hatch in the skies.

This was another old man. An old war buddy of Courtney’s, Colonel Roy Seals, who was previously with him in a drinking bout. A former high official in the American Navy, Sousuke could only remember him as a guest at the banquet who had sexually harassed Tessa. Originally he had a considerable position.

After taking down the AS the helicopter landed, Seals walked towards them immediately. He completely ignored Sousuke and Lemon, glancing here and there at the camp. And then he shouted at Courtney.

“The documents were all taken care off! Well, where is Tessa?”

“Well about that? She’s not here.”

At Courtney’s response, Seals fiercely turned his head stopped looking around.

“What was that? Didn’t you tell me that she was waiting here. I bought the M6A3 here, with her nightingale wind and a traditional nurse outfit, nursing me-”

“Sorry. I lied”



The main agenda of the online conference was the “correction” of the military power and supply balance in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Far East.

The Middle East accounted for a lot of interest in maintaining the status quo. In relation to the underground resources of Central Asia there was a need for a terrorist incident, while the Far East maintained the tension ensuring each nation enlarged their war funds.

The estimated number of deaths and damages were expected, in the long run it would turn out that the reports were positive. Their reports revealed a proactive and passive endorsement.

The “World Conquest” was already over-

The people of the world no longer noticed that fact. Of course, there was no need to notice it. This organization efficiently utilized funds, technology, and violence to have the power to get consent from the majority of the people.

The “World Conquest” was already over-

There was no need for all the fortune to fall under one hand. The carnivores in the Savanna didn’t have to eat the grass to decrease the amount of herbivores. What was most important was balance.

The “World Conquest” was already over-

The flow could no longer be changed. They themselves could no longer change. Not one of them understood the whole picture. The most important thing was that one not infuriate their superiors. And then they would continue with the flow.

No, how stupid.

The “World-

“Mister Silver, are you listening”

At the end stage of the conference, one of the managers called out to Leonard in an irritated voice. Of course he had been listening, but he had been out of it for a moment.

“Yes, what about?”

“About the project. The scale of this problem, we would need the cooperation of each of you.”

The man who spoke to him in such a harsh voice was Mister Gold. Although it was an ironclad rule to address each other like that, Leonard already knew his nationality and real name.

“As you say. As long as I can provide the information, I will share it with everyone.”

“Then, how long will you be neglecting that girl. Do you also intend to finish the ‘Investigation’?”

“My apologies. But, this approach could not detect the element.”

“Still the ‘Organic Vegetable’ theory”

A number of people laughed at Gold’s cynicism. Leonard calmly carried a smile.

“There is a demand for new ‘Black Technology’. Like the abstract case of the ‘Omni Sphere’. We want results.”

“Is that so? Then I will give you enough results.”

“I see. Then that might be the case” a man who was only a voice, snorted through the circuit line.

In the tone of changing the topic, Gold said, “Then there is the information. There are no specifics, but the organization has to make sure about the whereabouts of your girlfriend. It’s about time that the place would no longer be safe.”

“It’s something I’ve heard for the first time. We have increased the security.”

Of course he was not telling the truth. The observation satellite of NATO had been broken into from its inside- by someone who knew the system very well. Someone had taken a photograph at the greatest magnification of the mansion near Nickelo. Even the whitewashing relating to the funds. Although he didn’t know who, it seemed like a capable hacker. Although they

knew that it was someone related to the French DGSE, they had not yet been captured.

Not only that. There was a continuous monitor from the net with the same kind of intrusions. There was the existence of a person who had secretly snatched the same information from the shelf. No, it was not a human. It was the work of a large scale Artificial Intelligence.

To be able to accomplish that feat, there was no mistake that it was from that submarine's computer- the act of Dana. Even for Dana the first hacker's identity and location had not been found, in any case what was needed was to hold still.

Just like that. The mansion could no longer be considered safe.

"If it is the increase in security, we have already given you support. Three units of '1502' and three units of '1059' are already headed there" Mr. Gold said.

"That would help. They also had a great result at Merida."

There were a number of people who laughed at Leonard's Cynicism. But inside he thought, *it's finally here, what trouble*, and clicked his tongue without anyone hearing.

Then after discussing the agenda of several security threats, the online conference ended.

When he left the meeting room built in the basement of the Mansion Sabina Refunio was waiting for him.

"The unit has arrived."

"The ARX-8?"

"Yes. Mister Kalium is also waiting."

"He's Kalinin, right? Let's go."

Leonard left the mansion through a corridor, and headed for the helicopter landing field. Close to the landing field,

components of an AS were stored on a pallet. In front stood Andrei Kalinin.

The shirt he took off was gray, and a gray coat was draped over his right arm. From Alaska, he would have traveled straight there like that.

“What’s your impression of your first mission?” Leonard asked Kalinin.

“Particular. What about the unit?”

“That’s right. Just a moment.”

On top of the large pallet was the AS. Over the top of it was a tarpaulin sheet. That sheet took several people to uncover, and the AS underneath came into view. No matter how different the parts or armor, it looked extremely similar to Mithril’s 3rd generation AS, the M9 Gernsback.

It was a boring unit.

“This is their trump card?”

“Yes.” Kalinin answered with an expressionless face.

“The outward appearance is different from the Arbalest, and used the test type parts of the XM9. This unit is an ordinary M9- I heard that they used the parts from the E series.Can I see the core of the Lambda Driver?”

“Then, please have a look.”

Kalinin bowed, and signaled one of his men. Opening the armor at the back, it took a number of men to remove the hip armor, exposing the interior of the AS. Perpendicular to the cockpit, where originally the power source of the electrical equipment should have been, looked like a type of a large refrigerator.

Leonard, by chance, looked up at the frame of the AS, raising the unit’s hatch again. There was a cylinder of strong glass fixed in the buffer device. Inside the cylinder was a metallic brilliance filled with fluids.

The cylinder was the circuit of the Lambda Driver nucleus. If a power source was given, it would operate with the “fluid logic element” emitting rainbow-like lights like that of a DVD. This equipment was also installed on the Codarl and Behemoth, but the fluid processor in front of them had several times the capacity of the one made by Amalgam.

“There is no mistake” Kalinin said.

Leonard touched the surface of the cylinder, and contemplated.

The real form of the circuit, the buffer system and the cooling system, the fiber optic cable on both ends of the cylinder, there was nothing strange about them.

But-

No, nobody knew. He thought carefully about the unit in front of him and that man’s will. While recalling that man and his unit he remembered Bani Morauta’s face and laughed with a sort of snorting.

“Aah. Dispose of it.”

“Understood.” Kalinin answered, and gave orders to his men.

After a few minutes, the power source of the captured unit was removed. They removed the joints of the limbs, and left it sitting like that. If you compared it to a car it was like they had detached the chase and removed the engine.

The cylinder was dismantled and destroyed. The fluid inside was scattered to the surrounding. The heart of the unit’s wreckage was washed away with buckets and a mop.

During the work, Kalinin looked up at the window of the third floor of the mansion.

And he thought that she was there.

That girl, Chidori Kaname, hid her pale face in the window. She had seen the arm slave being dismantled, and had seen that Kalinin was the supervisor. Before being seen herself, she had stepped back and hid inside of the mansion, away from the windows.



Clouds filled the southwestern skies.

Thunder. The short sounds of thunder echoed.

A storm is coming-

He could feel the gloominess, and thought that a battle was being waged above.

A terrible atmospheric pressure shook the transport ship unforgivingly.

Upwards. Downwards. To the right. To the left.

This had continued for a number of hours already. But, having experienced bad weather like that before, it did not upset his stomach.

Most of the people on board were leaking out the voice of a dead man every time they spoke. The members of the Cargo Bay, who might have vomited at any time, shouted at the headset.

“One Minute!!”

The landing point was drawing near.

Sousuke lightly grabbed the joystick in the cockpit, making the last confirmation. There was no problem with the mechanism of the parachute. Weapons Control? OK. Communications system? OK. Navigation? OK. Maneuver control? Ok. Everything was Ok.

Then shall we go?

A giant Cargo Hatch slowly opened in the rear of the transport ship. The violent storm ripped at the inside of the hangar. The M6A3 Dark Bushnell connected to the rail and started its engines. He started to prepare for the violent work ahead.

Sousuke drew a large breath, and informed the crew of the transport ship.

“This is Uruz 7. Descending to target destination. Thank you for the escort. Uruz 7, starting descent.”

“Roger!” the Captain of the transport ship shouted at the wireless radio. “We pray for your luck, Uruz 7!”

Fierce sparks scattered all around.

The lock in the rail was unsealed, and Sousuke’s M6 was released into the sky.

Chapter 4: Night of Storm

The M6A3 Dark Bushnell that Sousuke was riding was soaring through the dark skies over the southern part of Mexico.

The violent gale made work of the free falling unit, creaking and squeaking. The cockpit also vibrated violently. It felt like the bones at the nape of his neck would break from the fierce impact. The digital altimeter steadily decreased, and the unit moved in many directions in the wind. The indicators of the Altitude readings were spinning in rotation. The ECS was off. Even though the M6A3 was equipped with an ECS, there would have been no meaning in using it during the violent storm.

The value in the altimeter cut at 30,000 feet.

First opening of the chute. Success.

The descent of the unit suddenly decreased in speed.

Second opening of the chute. Success.

The giant parachute opened on top of his head, and suddenly the gale beat even more brutally against him. The 10 plus tons unit shook, swimming in the air, pulling down the balance.

He reached 15000 feet. Continuing like that would make him crash on the surface.

The body of the M6A3 was being pulled around by the wind. The slackened wires of the parachutes became intertwined. Sousuke tried to control the unit; to somehow get it back to the descent altitude. He couldn't. In an instant decision he detached the parachute. He was drawing nearer to the land. He resisted the impulse to push the switch, and after waiting a second the back-up parachute opened automatically.

Success. Again the gale struck.

This time he predicted the wind well, and Sousuke skillfully swung his limbs, letting the unit ride the wind.

He drew close to the ground. Inside the view from the Night Vision sensor was a mountain district covered wide with broadleaf trees.

After 300.

200....100....50....

Breaking through the dome of the trees, the M6 hit the ground. The parachute was immediately detached by the altitude controls. The smoke of the shock absorbers from the joints spread out into the dense forest.

Sousuke manipulated the unit, scanning the surrounding areas agilely with the passive sensor. There were no signs of the enemy. The only heat sources that could be seen were the movements of the nocturnal creatures that had been surprised by the sudden drop of a metal giant. They were frantically running away.

The landing had been successful.

“Fu-....”

Sousuke, after confirming all safety measures, let out a big breath.

Sousuke’s M6 was crouching as a black lump in the forest. The fierce wind and rain knocked on the armor, and the muffled voice of the gas turbine engine burst out.

He confirmed his current location with the GPS. He was 20 kilometers northwest among the mountains from the objective mansion.

If he sped south he could quietly get within 10 kilometers of the target. He needed to get as close as possible. Then, if he were to be seen by the enemy, he would charge in full force. The priority would be to finish before the operation of the three Codarl

types. If he could destroy them before the pilots got on board, there would no longer be any fear of fighting the Lambda Drivers.

If it were actually only those three units, however.

Lemon and the others were on standby at another site. At the same time that Sousuke breached an opening the helicopter would immediately force a landing on the target mansion. The plan was to control the area with infantry.

They had no choice but to hope everything went that smoothly. Firstly, they could land on top of the mansion in a surprise attack, but there was a high probability that the transport would fall prey to anti-aircraft missiles. It would be the same if they tried to penetrate by sea. The prospects of attacking from the coast were good, but if they got within eight kilometers the infra-red sensors would be able to detect them.

If only I were in an M9....

If it were the M9s that Mithril used they could make a more flexible operation. Unfortunately they did not have the luxury to wish for that. If they were detected by the enemy, aside from the Codarls activating, they would have to suspend the operation and retreat. The enemy would of course strengthen their vigilance, and would abandon the mansion in a short amount of time.

During the battle in Namsak it was the only hint which he had derived from Kurama- and then everything would return to nothing.

He would have to redo everything. The unreachable hands holding Kaname would go somewhere else.

No- in the first place, was Kaname really in that mansion? On the contrary, was she really still alive? If she were to be alive, and was in that mansion, did she still have him in her heart? In his case, he had all but lost the memory of her in his hesitation at Namsak. For a time it had become distant. What if she were in that

man's arms? What if she had a troubled face? What if she said "don't look for me anymore" with a merciful look?

The operation varied in that degree. He felt unspeakable uncertainties and uneasiness, and they pressed hard on his chest. The scar that was left by Kurama was throbbing.

No.....

Actually, he was already bored with that kind of conflict. What should he be doing in that moment?

He needed to deceive the enemy's warning net and covertly and reliably get closer. While controlling his unit in the most ideal form, he simply had to accomplish his objective.

"Let's go." he muttered.

Sousuke's M6A3 advanced. Although it was natural, the unit's control system did not reply.



She was seriously growing irritated; the Notebook PC's network function had been completely disabled. Not only the software, but also the communications hardware itself had been uninstalled. After purposely opening the case at last, that was what Kaname had concluded.

Well, of course.

She had not given in to the collaboration with Amalgam. There was no reason to give her an electronic machine that would give out important information. They had considered that she might tell someone from the outside her whereabouts. Even if she tried to escape, there were those Alastors walking about in the surrounding areas of the mansion. She would not even get the chance to run away.

By looking at the stars in the night sky from the terrace she had managed to grasp the latitude from the trigonometry. North Latitude 15 degrees 40 minutes. There was also a rough world map on the premises. The coast concurred with that latitude. Was it Indonesia, the Arabian Peninsula or Southern Mexico? Most probably it was Southern Mexico.

She knew where she was, but there were no means for her to get away. Even so, she had a feeling of achievement. With that attitude, she started to investigate. Why was she simply housed there?

Kaname walked about the premises and tried to carefully and deeply observe. There had to be a hint for getting away. There might be something that she could use. That was what she thought.

What then after escaping? Then where would she plan to go?

Those were the thoughts that kept getting into her head. That's right. After escaping, there was no place she could go.

But when those thoughts steadily swelled up inside, Kaname shook her head and headed to the pool. Changing into a swimsuit she would plunge in, take 10 round trips, and somehow enjoy herself.

The people at the mansion had noticed the change in Kaname. She did not hide that fact. No matter what kind of situation she was in, iron bars spread out across the island.

Then one day, that man had arrived in the mansion. Andrei Kalinin.

He had apparently brought a 3rd generation AS from Mithril. Leonard had confirmed what was inside and had started to dismantle it. That was what Kaname saw from the window.

Why was he there? Did he betray them? Or would he be double crossing Amalgam?

This situation was shaking the inside of Kaname's heart. There had been several opportunities to have a direct conversation with the Russian, but not even once had they done so. She thought about what should be said if they were to meet, but most of the time Kalinin was outside giving directions to his subordinates.

He reviewed the defense and security of the premises. After observing a fragment of the subordinate's work, this was what Kaname had reasoned out.

She had a vague feeling that there was some disaster drawing near.

Those premonitions becoming reality happened the night of the storm, a few days after Kalinin had appeared.

The winds blew outside and large drops of rain hit the windows. The sound of waves closing on the coast roared, and a thundering and ominous sound echoed in the bedroom.

Kaname was lying in the bed and had settled into reading. Leonard Testarossa visited her room.

"What do you want?" Kaname said bluntly.

If it were like usual, such an attitude from her would draw a smile from him and he would casually shrug his shoulders. That night it was different. Leonard was not smiling, and only stood in the doorway without stirring.

"I want you to get dressed. Today or tomorrow.... we will be leaving this place."

"Why?"

"A lot of things. The situation has changed."

"If you feel like it, can you explain that situation to me?"

Leonard was silent. He never did reveal any of his real motives. That time was also the same. He only stood there, slowly examining something.

“Is that so?” Kaname said with her legs crossed on top of the bed. “If you’re not in the mood to speak then it’s fine. That’s just like you, treating me like a doll on some small island. Well, if that’s the case then I guess that kind of attitude can be expected.”

“That’s not it. To say unnecessary things to you, I think that it will bring about much more trouble here and there.”

“Then that’s a doll’s treatment.”

She stretched lightly. There was an irritating-like feeling growing, her voice became unnatural and sharp.

“I’m not as insensible as Tessa okay? No matter how superior or handsome or rich you are, with only that you devote yourself to something and become shrewd.”

“My sister is the same.”

“Right. What I was saying was, that was the girl of the past. Right now, that girl would go against you up front. That is why I’m saying something like this. You do understand, right?”

He did not deny nor confirm.

“You can’t answer, huh? I’ve only recently thought of this, but could it be that you are a terrible coward?”

After leaving some time, he muttered to himself.

“That’s right. It’s like what you said.”

Not yet. It was a face that had decided to raise the white flag.

But she did not have any mercy.

“Do you think by saying ‘I understand’ that you would look cool? If the opponent would be that person over there, well that’s also good. I also have that mood. Well, are you alright with that?”

“...if I say anything, you’re attitude won’t change, right?”

“You don’t seem to understand.” she said with a sneer.

It was as unpleasant as possible, hateful.

“Are you going to make me suffer? Shut me up, take away something, and look on smiling? And then just surrender someday? Well, I’m not really a super human, either way it might be possible. In this case- if that were to happen- will you be satisfied?”

“.....”

“You know in the next class, there was a disgusting guy. He weighed about 100 kilograms. He was always swearing, and constantly smirking at me and the other girls. You might say that he looked like a stalker. He had those indecent books about confinement and lolicon and he talked about them. I don’t know up to what point was true, though. In any case, that type. It was a guy where you completely didn’t know what he was thinking.then here’s the question. Between that disgusting guy and you, which one do you think I would prefer to go out with, who do you think I would choose?”

He could not answer after all. Expressionless, he just stood there upright.

“Are you listening? Which do you think?”

“Don’t ask questions in bad taste.”

“Answer me.”

“Stop with the indecency, won’t you continue another topic.”

“You can’t.” she said clearly. “Listen and be surprised. I am serious and thought about this question everyday- You really don’t understand. In short, the difference between you and that disgusting guy, either good looking or clumsy, it’s just only that. Well? Saying the unvarnished truth, what you are doing, it’s bad countenance.When Sousuke appeared in front of me, he was a fairly disgusting guy. But he was different from you. He didn’t laugh much. No matter what happens, he fights with it up front.

You right now, with an attitude that can see through everything, can't look straight at me. That's right- he was always serious."

"Can we have enough of this?"

Slowly walking, he approached in a refined manner, as usual, but his voice was short and cold.

"I'm always serious" he said.

"You don't look like it. You said that you love me right? Is that really true?"

"Yeah."

"Why? What do you love about me? Can you answer in a way that's easy to understand?"

"I told you before already."

"On the rooftop of the love hotel? Not that kind of explanation. In the end, you really don't understand how a person would love right? It's because of that manner of yours that Tessa looked the other way."

Leonard's fist, which was hidden in his pocket, clenched in anger. But without noticing the change, Kaname continued.

"With only your sarcasm and manner, you don't open your heart to anyone. You only look at a girl as an object. Does that thing still even exist? Didn't you get enough love from your parents?"

Suddenly Leonard gripped her shoulders. The slender and delicate body had a surprisingly strong grip. Resistance was not possible and he pushed Kaname to the bed.

"Then let me tell you. Look into my eyes."

"What are you-"

"Look."

His face was pushed into her field of vision. The graceful features were twisted with violent emotions. Kaname's instinct told her "don't look".

But, she looked.

Inside the gray pupils, where no light could be perceived, it flowed into her heart.

The torrents of thought. It was that. “Resonance”.

“.....!”

Kaname arched her back like she had been struck by lightning. This was unlike the vast experiences that she had before. It was a much more violent, wild, and gloomy image.

Kaname was in the middle of a fire.

In a burning corridor. Smoke swirled and an irritating odor reached her nose. The color of the flames were gray. A small girl was crying. Intermittent gunshots reverberated, the sound of someone screaming echoed in their ears.

The house was being attacked.

“Take those two to the basement.” the man called out.

“It’s no use. They’ll find us immediately.” the woman answered, crying.

“Jerry will be coming to save us soon. If we can hold out for 10 more minutes..... Go, Maria. I’ll defend the south side from the enemy.”

“Wait, Carl. Stay with me.”

“I can’t. Go.”

“Please.”

But the man went away. The woman was embracing her two children, mostly muttering words without hate.

“It’s always like this. That’s why I-”

With the other men.

There was suddenly a sense of being nauseated. Entangled on top of the bed, with charming persons. That man goes far overseas to accomplish his missions, but the woman was always drowning. In the eyes of the public she was a faithful wife, but she

had a cheating face. The young boy knew of this. His eyes always saw it.

The gunshots were nearing.

The woman became frightened. Choking on the smoke, she took the children and ran for the basement. They went down the stairs, towards the mountains of lumber and gardening supplies.

There were gunshots on the upper floor. The sound of someone falling. Unknown people were coming down the stairs. The ugly footsteps were drawing near.

“Hide.”

The woman, Mother, told her children. She pushed the crying girl inside of a wooden box. On top of that she covered it with a worn-out blanket. The footsteps would be there soon. The remaining child... there was no more time to hide the boy.

In the eyes of the mother and the boy.

The ugly expression of the woman, Kaname in her lifetime could not forget it.

Patience. Hesitation. And hatred for something.

This child knows of my betrayal.

Always blaming me. Thinks of me as a prostitute. With that eerily excellent intellect, scorning me.

“Mother.....?” the boy said, but the mother did not respond.

She was a beautiful woman. With that face she looked her own child in the eyes, it was real and raw. Wrapping it in extremes.

But it was also rather the opposite. She only looked with her eyes.

That was why her will was decisive, with some sort of fate driving her mad.

The men came.

With a black luster of automatic pistols.

“Where is the other child?” the man said.

“In the house of a relative. Please, save me-”

The mother grabbing her son by the shoulders, offering him to them. Like a wallet produced from her bosom, offering it to a thief.

The despair and nihility.

All of it flowed acutely into her heart, and Kaname’s heart was disturbed.

It must have been a few seconds, no a few minutes. When Kaname regained consciousness, Leonard had already let her go and was sitting on a chair in the corner of the room.

“.....”

Facing up from the side of the king sized bed she sat up. Her breath was still rough. Kaname noticed that her back was wet and full of sweat.

The sound of the rain knocking on the windows remained desperately in her ears.

“It’s something not even my sister knows.” Leonard muttered absentmindedly.

“....then, what?”

A sad past, a difficult experience. Something that you would need someone’s back to lean on for. Even for Sousuke. Even for her. That was surely a pity, but right then there was no reason for him to flaunt a smile while playing with her fate.

When Kaname fully understood this thought, Leonard let out a sigh.

“If this were to be told to ordinary humans with words, it is mostly that reaction. But you are different. That’s why this is how you were told. You understand right. This is not an affair of others.”

That was correct. It had become something that was not the affair of others. That direct pain and sadness. It was natural to her for having the same experience.

She felt a terrible nausea.

She coughed many times. No matter where she stood, the sheets had become dirty.

Why was it? When she was still young, she remembered a scene of a stone being turned over by the riverbed. She remembered the earthworm and centipede under the rock; those ugly insects were crowded together, wriggling. In that awful scene deceit was trailing here and there. Trust, love, friendship and righteousness, all those flowery words became fruitless feelings.

Humans were dirty.

Everyone, even him, only lied. Was only hiding things.

Only that disposition could be felt.

“It’s not that I want you to give me your sympathies.”

Leonard said. “And I don’t want to use the drama as justification. I was thinking, and acting. With my own will. It has nothing to do with cursing my own mother.”

“Then, why....”

“I opened my heart, just like you said. And that is all.”

“.....”

He stood up, heading straight for her.

“To a killer, being killed is the worst. There are also varying problems in the world. Being betrayed by your partner or family, being refused, it is much more difficult than dying. On that point, my father felt at ease without knowing anything. An exemplary soldier, an exemplary officer, an exemplary husband, for his loving family. He believed in the purity of his family and died protecting them. More than his character, it was heroic.”

“That’s....”

“Oh well, if you say that I was ‘smiling frivolously’, it might be because of that feeling. The inhabitants of the romantic world are carefree. Maybe that’s just it.”

“But, I don’t understand.” Kaname said. The usual harsh contact with him had already been erased. “With you like that, why me?”

“Well, I wonder why.”

Standing alone and saying this, he went out of the room. At that point, he added.

“Anyway I hope you would get dressed quickly. There is something that I want to show you....”

At that moment, the glass in the window and all the furniture shook strongly.

It was not the storm. It was the sound of an explosion from far away.



Sousuke had managed to favorably approach within 10 kilometers of the mansion.

Changing the M6A3 to silent mode, he drew closer to the mansion. As expected, he soon encountered the enemy’s warning systems.

There were anti-ECS radars, infra-red sensors, pressure sensors, and even simple wires. With just the M6’s electrical equipment he barely managed to deceive the variety of them, and he had to take a large detour to avoid the anti ECS sensors.

At most he managed to covertly get nearer by 2 kilometers.

When he thought that he no longer needed to attack by proceeding with the warning net, he heard the sounds of an explosion.

“.....?”

It was from far away. About 4 kilometers Northeast.

Sousuke, alone in the middle of the jungle, stopped his unit and took out the periscope that had been stored in his left arm. He swiftly extended the flexible sensor and faced the direction of the explosion

In the skies filled with the wild wind and rain, there were traces of explosions and heat sources.

It must have been a helicopter or some sort of aircraft. It was taking shots from the Warning system's anti air attacks.

It can't be, Lemon....?

With a moment's hesitation, he called out on the custom channel of the wireless radio. Michael Lemon's carefree voice responded, and informed him that they were still standing by at the appointed position.

"Sound of explosions? What's the meaning of this?"

"I don't know. I'll investigate right now."

If the ones being shot at were not Lemon and the others, then which side did they belong to?

Can I see from just the Periscope's sensor...?

Since it was only a small sensor that was supposed to be used at short distance during street combat he wouldn't be able to gather much information. Because of the storm the field of vision was terrible. In the meantime, near the first explosion there was another movement. This time it was on the ground. The trees in the jungle were set ablaze.

The anti air cannons of the warning net were destroyed.

Most probably because of the influence of the destroyed cannon an AS managed to land-

"A battle is happening."

"What? With who?"

Gunfire flickered in the jungle. There was something that broke through the dome of the forest, leaping into the air. That was

an AS. A leap from a battle maneuver. It stayed in the air for a short time and immediately disappeared from his field of vision.

“It’s an M9.” Sousuke concluded.

He manually played back the data that had been captured in the sensor and magnified it.

There was no mistake. There was no other AS than the M9 Gernsback with that smart silhouette. An M9 was fighting in a place like that. Which side were they from?

“The remaining military force of Mithril is attacking?”

Lemon asked from the wireless radio. As far as he knew, only Mithril made use of the M9 in actual combat.

“Unknown. But unlikely.”

“Why?”

“My M6 managed to get here unseen. With the abilities of the next generation AS, a better and a much more covert operation can be achieved. Regardless of who, I do not think that the members of Mithril who uses an M9 would make a mistake like that.”

Nevertheless, that M9 was slightly different from the slender specifications of Mithril. Like the Sensor on the head, or the shape of the shoulder armor. And the thickness of the armor was much larger than the M9 that he knew. And there were only a few movements. As for the characteristics of that unit, its movements were not sharp.

“Then-”

“Probably the US army” another voice interrupted beside Lemon. It was Colonel Roy Seals who had brought the M6A3.

“It’s those guys at the army. The Assault squad Delta Force, they already made use of the M9. Of course it was not made public.”

“What did you say? Then why are they here-”

“Now we ascertained the location. And our colleagues don’t even know the reason. This is really reckless....”

At any rate it was a countryman. Seals voice echoed in a pondering voice towards the M9.

But to Lemon and the others, who acted on their own, it seemed strange that the American military would attack a location of Amalgam’s. Amalgam had the capability to seal off the regular army with political power. Their aim and the operation’s objective was not clear.

“There are too many to explain. Sousuke, let’s suspend the operation. I have a bad feeling about this.”

“Aah, but....”

Lemon was right; they should suspend the operation now that it was on the verge of trouble. Even then, Sousuke hesitated.

“No buts right? Which this much disturbance going on, the Codarl types of the enemy would be operational. You can expect to get shot when you get close to the target.”

With the new image from the satellite just before the operation, it was clear that the Codarl types were in that mansion. It was not because there were signs, the coast and unpaved roads of the premises after the rain had showed footprints with the characteristics of a 3rd generation AS.

So it’s nothing but retreat after all?

If thinking normally that would be the case. But, if he gave up there, the girl who might be in that mansion-

“Stand by. I will bet on that assault.” Sousuke informed them without thinking further.

After the incident at North Korea, there was a similar “unreasonable” sickness. But after getting all the way there, what was most important was time. If he decided to penetrate then he had to do it fast.

Sousuke switched the Silent mode from the APU (Assisted Power Unit) started the gas turbine engine.

“The Enemy will be paying attention to that squad of M9. We have to take that opportunity.”

“Come back, Sousuke! That’s reckless!”

“Don’t worry. I will retreat when it becomes impossible.”

After answering that, Sousuke did not know what he said and remembered the uneasiness. What was waiting ahead? That was all he wondered about.

The sound of rain knocked on the intense armor. Pushing his way through the thick trees, he walked his unit straight ahead. The branches and leaves were dancing on the trail as the howl of his engine reverberated. With the distractions to the enemy’s warning network their caution had sunk into its lowest level. What was regretted at that moment was time.

Chidori-

He still didn’t know if she was there. But, he had to grab it no matter what hand he was dealt. Why was it that he felt that she was there? He felt that she was near and was waiting for him. It had nothing to do with her being a Whispered. It was instinct. It was like a sense of smell that you can’t explain logically.

The indications of the digital map showed that the mansion was only two kilometers away.

In that position there were elevated hills that were an obstruction to his eyesight. He needed just a little more. He planned to penetrate clockwise and gallop onto the premises, calling her name on the exterior speakers. He might be able see her. She might be calling out from somewhere. If he could managed to snatch her, he would escape at full speed-

An alarm sounded.

Direction, 8 o’clock. Distance, 300.

“!”

With the reaction speed of the M6 he wouldn't be able to evade. He swung the unit with its shoulders and put himself into a defense position with all his might.

Klunk. A strong impact.

The unit shook. The cockpit trembled. From left to back there were a number of shells flying off, hitting the shoulder armor as violent sparks scattered.

He looked at the pattern captured from the Thermal Sensors. There was something that wiggled quickly on the slope at high speed on two legs.

In other words an AS.

How easy...

Sousuke smacked his lips and investigated the data. If he were in an M9 he would be able to tell which type of unit it was immediately, but his unit did not have a strong AI like that.

The enemy was a 3rd generation AS. Most probably a Codarl type.

With it suddenly coming out like that continuing on with the operation was impossible. Gathering all his equipment and technical skills, he had to run away with all his might.

The recovery of Kaname was out of the question.

He gritted his teeth with regret. But he did not give up.

Suddenly an alarm sounded.

The enemy Codarl fired and was headed his way. Although it was only one unit, it was an opponent that was excessive. Moreover that unit was attacking.

In the waterfall-like rain, he made use of the terrain, barely evading the shots of the enemy. The driving impact of the shells were splashing about around the M6.

Just a margin.

Desperately firing the scatter shot gun in his possession, the Codarl lightly stepped up and “caught” the shells. The atmosphere in front was distorted, and the unit managed to stop the shells from hitting. A piercing rupture reverberated and the shells that were supposedly hit were smashed and burned up.

Lambda Driver.

That cheating unsystematic device. He knew its destructive power all too well. Yet there he stood, feeling like an idiot facing it with an ordinary AS.

“But....”

If it was to run away, he could do something.

Sousuke smoothly manipulated the stick, discharging the smoke bomb and radar interference bomb equipped on his back. He let the rocket fly from inside the cylinder, exploding overhead. Together with the glaring light the smoke spread, covering the area.

At that moment he lost sight of the enemy. Sousuke changed to silent mode and headed north. Taking into consideration the range between them, he managed to gain a suitable distance. Increasing the speed in his direction, he was using the terrain to skillfully hide and get away, the hard part was-

“!”

Too naive.

The enemy unit was in front. Distance 300.

The enemy had read his movement. Anticipating.

The gray armored Codarl, with its glaring red eye pressed on the M6. It aimed the muzzle of its carbine in his direction.

Discharge.

The 35 mm smashed into the armor, attacking Sousuke with a fierce impact. But he could still move. He swung the unit and made an evasive action. He knew that it was useless, but he had to try and return fire. It was useless after all. The said

Gravitational field repelled all attacks. The Codarl extracted a monomolecular cutter. It was only a few steps away. It planned to skewer his cockpit. No matter how much he attacked, the gravitational field of the Lambda Driver that expanded in its front had no fear.

But, its back was different.

Immediately in front of Sousuke's eyes, there was an explosion on the Codarl's back. Suddenly, from behind it, it took a high caliber shell.

Smoke blew out and the enemy unit staggered. It was not a fatal damage. It tried evasive action by flying sideways, trying to pinpoint the attack from behind.

Immediately on the enemy unit's side, a single AS appeared. It was a gray M9.

A complete surprise attack from nearby.

With a large Crimson Edge Monomolecular Cutter at stance, the gray M9 crashed into the abdomen of the Codarl. The ear piercing sound echoed and large sparks were dancing about.

"It can't be...."

That M9 was not from the American military. He knew it well, it was the familiar "E series" unit. There was no mistake in his vision. It was the E series M9 with a Blade Antenna equipped.

After destroying the central block, the Codarl collapsed. Carelessly flying about from the ruins, the M9 headed towards him, announcing from its exterior speakers.

"...Geez...."

It was the voice of a woman.

"....what a terrible fight. Did you see it very well?"

The voice of the woman Sousuke also knew very well.

It was Melissa Mao. She was alive.

"Mao."

“Sousuke. It’s you after all.”

The sound of the woman bounced.

“A calm interaction with the Codarl as the opponent, and then those movements, that shot cannon. I thought that it would be-”

“Right, I told you, didn’t I? It’s absolute!”

There was another voice. On elevated ground 80 meters away, another AS could be seen. It was brandishing a large gun barreled sniper cannon.

“Kurz.”

“You’re alive after all. You moody guy!”

It was an unforgiving jeer. There was no mistake. It was Kurz Weber. He was also alive.

“But, why are you here-”

“That’s what we want to hear from you, and we have piles of things to talk about. But it seems there are new comers here.” Mao muttered, suddenly lowering her own unit’s back.

“Two more Codarls. 7 O’clock. Surprise attacks will no longer work. Right now there is only me and Kurz, can you do it, Sousuke?”

“Affirmative.” Sousuke replied, quickly using the damage control on his unit.

It was a mixed squad with two M9s and one M6, going against two Lambda Driver equipped units. There was a bad difference in combat percentage.

However-

“No problem. I will join you.”

“Hehe. We’ll let you see the flavor of the experts” Kurz said.

“Fine! It’s sudden, but it’s the trio comeback!” Mao said.

There were a mountain of questions he wanted to ask them, but it was not the time for carefree talk. First, they had to take care of the enemy in front of them.

Finally the sensors of the M6 managed to capture the traces of the enemy.

Direction 8 o'clock. Distance 1500.

Before handing down the details of the instructions, Mao said, "Well, let's get even with those bastards! Guys! Are you ready!?"

"Whenever!"

"Wherever!"

Kurz and Sousuke answered. Taking that, Mao shouted.

"OK. Break!"

The three ASes leapt out in different directions.



The symbols on the screen were jumbled together. The mountainous region wagon tracks of the artillery were fiercely fluttering about in the night.

A small squad AS combat; no matter how you looked at it, it was similar to a basketball or soccer match.

None of the units had time for breathers and they all moved organically. Each and every one was running about, leaping, and enclosing the opposite side of the enemy. There was a time when it was flexible, and a time when it was overbearing. The “ball” was like a combat initiative. They would alternatively weave and feint, drawing out a pass or a dribble from both sides. One unit would be a decoy and the other would attack with a fatal strike.

“Uruz 6, pull Alpha towards the west.” Mao shouted.

“Roger!” came the immediate reply.

“Uruz 7, take Bravo and head southwards like that. How many seconds will you need?”

“15 seconds.” Sousuke replied.

“I’m counting on you.”

“Roger.”

With just that short exchange a maximum understanding had been reached.

One year before, Sousuke and the others had to be pressured into a hard fight with a single Codarl and were almost completely annihilated.

But now, without anything, they no longer feared the shadow of the Lambda Driver equipped unit.

From there they started to structure by trial and error the theory of how to face an opponent with a Lambda Driver. They managed to get a thorough training of tactics during the Hong Kong incident, when they took down a Codarl type. And also they now had the Gravitational field detection device called “fairy eyes”.

They had also enhanced their know-how with a number of heavy simulations.

The end result of the accumulation of their experiences was that the Codarl was no longer an “absolutely undefeatable enemy.”

Of course having two units as opponents was dangerous, but it was no longer a “desperate” battle.

Moreover it was the three of them.

Mao and Kurz, and also Sousuke, were a thoroughly devoted team that had the best AS combat squad rhythm and tactics. In this world they were the also the pilots with the most experience battling ASes equipped with Lambda Drivers.

It seems that their skills haven't fallen- Sousuke thought, glancing sidelong at the movements of Mao and Kurz.

Piloting an M6 would make him the dullest in movement. There was nothing that could be done about that.

But Sousuke understood the successive movements of the other two.

If he were to draw the enemy AS pressing on, little by little- its caution would be averted little by little. It would think that he was running away, and when turning around the other two units would attack severely.

Mao's and Kurz's units' “fairy eyes” could send real time data and detected the initiation and timing of the Lambda Driver.

Between the two units one unit would aim and plunge into position.

Sousuke's M6, that had become the lure, would draw in the Codarl. After shooting his shot cannon the enemy blocked with its gravitational field. Kurz's unit fired, that was also blocked. The enemy was looking out for an attack in another direction. It was not that easy to make a surprise attack.

The enemy unit fired at Sousuke. Impact. He used the shot cannon used as a shield and it became two equal parts.

After losing any means of attacking, Sousuke made a short shout.

“I will do it.”

The other two already understood his intentions.

Mao and Kurz pressed on the Codarl, continuing to pour in shells. The gravitational field snapped around. The enemy’s attention centered into the two M9s. Mao’s unit and Kurz’s unit got nearer to the enemy, almost at a collision distance, and passed each other at high speed.

In that instant, Mao and Kurz threw their weapons overhead.

From the point of the view of the enemy, one moment the two M9s had weapons, the next they were suddenly unarmed. The two sets of rifle that both units threw were drawing a parabola and spinning- Sousuke’s M6 jumped behind the enemy, getting into the exact position.

He caught them in mid-air.

After losing the shot cannon the M6 who was no longer a threat. But now it gripped the two sets of rifles and landed behind the Codarl.

“First one unit.”

In no time, with two sets of rifles, he shot with full force.

There were muffled sounds from the gunshots and surging flames from the discharge. Countless numbers of 40mm and multiple shots of 76mm shells attacked the back of the Codarl. The armor broke; the reactor and cockpit were smashed. The enemy unit was split in half.

Sousuke gave the crushing blow with the rifles and returned them to his two comrades.

“Haha! Now you got even!”

Kurz’s unit turned and took the sniper cannon.

“There is still one more unit! You can laugh after that!”

Mao casually took the rifle and without a moments delay started firing a feint towards the Codarl. The three units did not stop and deployed, continuing with combat maneuvers to confuse the enemy.

The remaining enemy seemed to be disturbed. Firstly he did not think that they would be defeated. With wonderful cooperation and tricks his partner had been destroyed. Those three enemy units were tough. They were not any ordinary opponents- this was what he concluded.

“Can you two handle this?” Sousuke said in his unit.

“I think we can, but what do you mean?” Mao asked.

“Kaname is in the target mansion. I’m going to search for her.”

“Kaname is in there!?” Kurz asked.

“I lost time. Let me go.”

Sousuke’s M6 had lost its main weapon, the shot cannon. There was really nothing much he could do there. Mao had also made that judgment, and immediately replied.

“I understand. Be careful. After were done here we’ll follow.”

“Thank you.”

“Hey, Sousuke! There’s a mountain of things that I want to talk to you about. Don’t you die! This is an order!”

“Huh?”

Sousuke knitted his brow at Kurz’s words.

“Why is it an order?”

“huhum. Because I’m a Master Sergeant!”

“You are?”

“Yup”

“I don’t really understand, but it seems you guys are seriously shorthanded....”

“.....”

“That’s right. Well, you mean a drowning man clutching straws-”

The Codarl pressed on to the three units. After attacking with the shockwave of the Lambda Driver, the three units scattered.

“-this is no time to have a laid back conversation!”

“That’s right. If you’re going then get going!”

The two M9s moved to ambush.

“I leave it to you.”

Sousuke changed his posture, and headed straight in the direction of the mansion.



Hearing Mao saying “they met Sousuke” during battle, Tessa, who had listened to the announcement on the *de Danaan*, was having a feeling that was different from being happy. That was what she felt.

“So he’s alive.”

Of course she was happy that Sagara Sousuke was alive. But when she thought about the reason why he was there, it hurt her heart a little.

He would go anywhere for the sake of that girl.

There was some strangeness in that simple honesty. Also sadness. That person was that important. It was both amazing and lonely.

No.

Having those lingering feelings just then was absurd. Right now she had to concentrate on the mission.

Until then Tessa had been making use of the full application of *de Danaan*'s AI, Dana, chasing after the trail of Leonard. They had been secretly observing all the intelligence agencies of various countries and their surveillance systems. Finally they had managed to find a little trace and had thoroughly followed up on it.

After throwing out their net they had found suspicious movement of the NATO military satellite. Someone, a small-scaled organization, had elaborately investigated that area a few days ago.

They didn't know how that "small-scaled organization had managed the trick, but they soon found out that it had shipped an American military M6A3 to Florida. The person who had procured that M6 with just the words, "It was easy" was named Colonel Seals. When she heard that Tessa had thought, "it might be him". In other words, Sagara Sousuke. If there was someone in Mithril who had any connection with Seals or Courtney, it was herself and Admiral Borda, Mardukas, and also Sousuke.

That mansion was involved with Amalgam. There was also no mistake that Leonard was there.

Sousuke had managed to get a lending hand. Tessa had immediately turned the ship 180 degrees, and headed to the coast of Southern Mexico.

At that time, the American Army also sensed the movement. After receiving the information from the CIA (American Central Intelligence Agency), the prepared M9 squad was deployed and dispatched to said mansion. How the CIA managed to get its hands on the information about the mansion, was still uncertain-

Mao, who was still in the middle of combat, said over the wireless radio.

“Currently in the middle of battle with a Codarl type. Where’s the Cruise Missile support?”

“It was already launched. Transmitting data.”

“Confirmed. I think this will do it. Where’s Uruz 1?”

“Finishing up the observation of the American Special forces, and heading towards there. But be careful.”

“I understand. Don’t worry, Tessa.”

The symbol for Mao’s unit was projected into the screen. The fierce movements of the enemy unit’s symbol unfolded as the gunfight continued.



The storm was getting even fiercer. With just a reserve handgun Sousuke’s M6A3 Dark Bushnell leapt at full speed toward the loose hill.

Based on the data they had collected there were no longer any Codarl types deployed at the target mansion. He, Mao and Kurz had already dealt with two units, and currently one unit was in the middle of combat. That should have been all.

It’s there...!

The first thing he saw in the darkness was the stormy sea in the night.

And then, on a clearing on the coast, there was a huge site spreading across. It might have been one whole kilometer across. In the middle was a white mansion. It was about the size of a Japanese school building, and had a surrounding tennis court, pool, and a garden.

He had slapped into his head everything related to the position from the satellite photo. The M6A3 at least had an anti-tank sensor and could detect anti AS mines. Passing through the net of alarms, Sousuke headed straight to the center of the mansion.

“Lemon, can you hear me-?”

Sousuke now called out on the wireless radio to Michael Lemon, who was on standby. Immediately after responding, he told Lemon about his short encounter with his buddies in Mithril.

“I don’t fully understand, but do you think that is good news?”

“Affirmative. They can be trusted.”

“I see. Then we have news over here too. The guys we were contacting before, together over there-”

There was a terrible noise from the wireless radio. The storm made the reception bad and electromagnetic disturbance restricted it in the neighboring areas.

“Over here, what?”

“-do you hear me Sousuke? I also concluded this, but somehow-”

“I can’t hear you. Repeat, Lemon.”

“--If it gets bad, standby on the next coordinates--”

“What are you talking about?”

“----Teen----prepared----”

“I can’t hear you. What are you talking about?”

“---that’s why, no matter what kind of unit-----I also----additional----”

“Lemon?”

“----Red-----3rd----strange----”

He heard sound of an alarm.

Established into the perimeter was a 20mm class Sentry Gun, and it was aiming at him. It was an unmanned attack system

that automatically reacted to enemies. He had been detected by its radar wave. Sousuke gave up on the operation of the wireless radio and immediately attacks with the hand gun. The Sentry Gun was destroyed after taking the 25mm shells.

There was no enemy infantry. No armored cars either.

No-

There were a number of those life-sized ASes, Alastors. Leaping out from the shrubs, they fired 50 caliber rifle bullets from their arms. The extent of those bullets would not dent the armor of the M6. One unit was torn into pieces by the hand gun, and another one was kicked. The Alastors would be tough in the flesh, but taking one down with an AS was simple.

Switching on the exterior speakers, he called out.

“Chidori”

Where are you-?

“Chidori”

Show yourself-

From the courtyard he saw a black sedan running out. It broke through the center of the garden to the stone paved road and headed straight north.

That car....?

Did they deem escaping via helicopter too difficult?

Sousuke chased after the car, and fired an intimidating shot towards the car.

“Stop!”

But the car did not stop. The 12.7mm machine gun in his left arm was set to semi-automatic. Aiming carefully, he fired several shots at the hood. The engine was shot and at once water vapor spewed out from the black car. It swerved to the left and right, and finally stopped at the curb in the road.

“Slowly come out with both of your hands up!” he ordered from his exterior speakers.

The door opened and the driver got out. He raised both hands and looked at him.

“Is there a girl riding?”

“I don’t know....”

After only saying that, the driver dashed away. Sousuke ignored the running driver and operated his sensors. With infra-red mode he scanned the car. There was no heat signature from humans in the backseat.

The sinking manner of the car also showed signs that several people had ridden it-

“.....!”

Instinct made him move. He used both arms to cover the cockpit block and made the unit fly back as quickly as he could.

Immediately following, the car exploded.

In the rear were a few hundred kilograms of high efficiency explosives. With the blast of the violent shockwave, and the fragments swooping in at supersonic speed, the 10-plus ton unit was brushed away. If it were on a human scale, it would be like the explosion of a hand grenade from only a few meters away.

The fierce impact shook Sousuke inside the cockpit. The unit fell into a somersault. Falling on its left it took down a few trees in the garden.

“.....!”

It was a trap.

The screen was completely black. The head sensor was destroyed. Warning lights flickered wildly.

Electricity was decreasing. Oil pressure was decreasing.

Fire broke across the various parts. The motor of the two arms that covered the cockpit was down. The cooling apparatus

had shut down. The posture control gyro was in serious break down. The main and backup control systems ceased to operate.

If he had noticed it a little later he might have sustained much heavier damage. Sousuke's head was getting dizzy. Briskly manipulating the stick and switch, he operated the damage control.

The reserved optical sensor started up, the backup sensor installed in the crotch region functioned like a type of home video camera. While receiving the damage, it was equipped for escape with a guaranteed minimum field of vision. Of course it was not equipped with night vision function.

At any rate, he had to withdraw from there-

Using freely both his legs which could not move, he somehow managed to stand.

But the enemy was unforgiving.

Hiding from somewhere, a number of infantry appeared everywhere and fired a hand-carried rocket launcher. With a clear aim, it would be a controlled attack. If only he had not received so much damage, he would have been able to evade the attacking soldiers. If he had had clearer judgment... but that was impossible at that point.

The foot and arm, and even the hips were bombarded with shots.

Even the front armor of the cockpit.

The front armor of the M6A3 had a means to withstand plastic explosives. It prevented the burning gas from the rockets from jumping into the cockpit. Even then, the control system and electrical systems were torn.

He could no longer take even one step. Sousuke's M6A3 tumbled right then and there.

"Lemon, can you hear me?"

Wanting to tell him that his unit has stopped functioning, Sousuke called out on his wireless radio to Lemon, who was standing by in a distant place.

“Lemon, this is--”

No good. The wireless radio was dead.

He had to abandon the unit and escape.

Sousuke pulled the emergency escape lever. The detonation functioned and the destroyed head part and the cockpit’s ceiling section blew off.

Beside the hatch he had stowed a German made compact sub-machine gun which he took out and loaded with ammo. Pulling the pin on a smoke grenade he threw it outside the unit. White smoke surrounded the heavily damaged unit. He couldn’t be at ease because the enemy might have had infrared scope equipment on, but that didn’t seem to be the case.

He applied the last mechanism to the unit.

Crawling out from the hatch, he got down from the burning heat of the unit.

At that time, a voice came out.

“You’re surrounded. Throw away your weapon.”

It came from 8 o’clock. Distance, roughly 30 meters.

Most probably the commander of the mansion’s defenses. It was the voice of a clam man.

No....

This voice?

Hiding in the shadows of the M6’s right arm armor, Sousuke questioned the direction of the wary voice.

In the direction of the swirling smoke--

Continuing to encircle the mansion, on top of the corridor of the two-story building, overlooking Sousuke from the roof, stood a man in a field uniform. A large built Caucasian. Gray hair

tied back in a ponytail. A finely chiseled face, with a look intent on shooting.

There was no mistake.

That man was-

“Lieutenant Commander” Sousuke muttered as his eyes widened.

As for the surrounding enemies, in that instant he had forgotten them.

“.....Remember the time during Afghanistan, Sagara Sousuke” Andrei Kalinin said.

“Wha....”

“I win again. If only your heart was not stolen by that girl, you wouldn’t be caught in a trap of this degree.”

“Lieutenant Commander? What is this--” Sousuke said, half believing half doubting.

“It’s as you see. I’ve become a man of Amalgam. The person who goes against Leonard Testarossa and the organization, I will remove him with efficiency.”

“Impossible. That’s....”

It couldn’t be. More than that, the Lieutenant Commander had cooperated with them. Was there another operation being conducted? Intending a double cross, he got nearer to the center of Amalgam...

“Unfortunately, this is not a decoy operation as you think it is. I came here by my own will, your enemy. If you resist, I will not hesitate to order you shot down. Not killing you right here is because I want information from you.”

“Then, why?”

“There is no need for you to know.” Kalinin said with the usual calm attitude.



After saying that, he no longer intended to explain anything. Sousuke knew very well the pain in that truth, but—
“Where is Chidori? Is she here?”

“She is here, what do you intend to do?”

“Let me see her.”

“I cannot permit you. She and Mister Testarossa are in the middle of preparing for their escape. The US Military, Mao and the others, and then you.....all the enemies must be repelled, even then this place had already been exposed.”

“Mao and the others....?”

“Drop your weapons, Sergeant.”

Kalinin brought up one hand. His subordinates then aimed their weapons at Sousuke.

“I think it’s good that it was said like that.”

It was a new voice.

From behind Kalinin, Leonard Testarossa appeared.



Belfagan Clouseau piloting his black M9, Falke, made use of the black stormy night and the terrain and rushed to join Mao in battle. He drew, unnoticed, nearer to the enemy Codarl and got into the perfect position.

“Fire!”

Mao’s unit and Kurz’s unit summed up a complex attack with a feint mix. The Cruise Missile, which was on standby in midair after being launched from the *de Danaan*, attacked. They turned the tides with their attacks on the enemy’s flank, and Clouseau made doubly sure with his own attack.

Aiming his monomolecular cutter at its abdomen, he grabbed its arm and made a throw. Mao and Kurz shot the Codarl whose posture had pulled it. Without any means of escape, the enemy unit was bombarded with shots in mid air.

“That’s one” Kurz said.

“What about the US Military?” Mao asked Clouseau.

He had separated from Mao just a while ago, spying on the battle of the American Special Forces.

“Looks like they’ve withdrawn. They have this tune of not knowing clearly the operation objective and enemy’s military force. Like, how do you say this-”

“Like being controlled by someone?”

“That’s it. The characteristics of the Special Forces, ‘I know what I am doing’, I don’t seem to have felt that mood. There are subtle hesitations in their cooperation and battle formation.”

“Aah. I see-” Kurz said. “They don’t have enough endurance huh? Do they have those grudging feelings towards the unreasonable orders from the higher ups?”

“We won’t know unless we’re in the same profession. Ordinarily it would have been stickier. In the mean time they’ve withdrawn. Being exhausted in an operation that you don’t understand, anybody would dismiss this.”

“Even then, I wonder what’s happening....?”

Apparently ignorant of the circumstances there, there weren’t any more signs of the enemy; at least, that was what the odor in the air smelled like.

“Nothing has been said yet. It seems that this is what Lieutenant Commander had expected.moreover, what about Sagara?”

After hearing that he was alive, Clouseau had not uttered one word about Sousuke.

“Yeah, about that---”

At that moment, the sound of alarm in each of their three units sounded.

“!!”

Three o'clock, seven o'clock, 10 o'clock, simultaneous attacks from three directions. Additionally it was from anti tank missiles with mid caliber and high caliber shells.

Mao's unit started her ECM (Electronic Counter Measures), Kurz's unit increased his feint shots from his position that took a snipe, Clouseau's unit took out an infrared jamming device from his weapons rack and threw it in.

"Another enemy!?" Mao shouted evading the missile, and entering combat maneuvers.

"Yeah. And there's three of them." Kurz said jumping into the shelter and quickly aiming at the enemy unit at high speed.

"Be careful, they were different from the ones before." Clouseau said taking a stance with the carbine gun equipped from his back.

There was no mistake that these were Lambda Driver equipped units. They were firing from an unreasonable direction. The enemies were able to evade their attacks, and they gave off the impression that they were daring them to come and take it.

The three units came from three different directions.

The "fairy eyes" detected a gravitational field. They evaded with full force. The new enemy and the M9s were entangled at lightning speed, with sparks scattering in the distance.

There was a strong impact. Warning lights flashed, and on Clouseau's unit from the left elbow downwards had been blown off. Unable to evade the gravitational field attack, the drive system had torn off.

".....!"

They understood what had happened with the real time data link. Mao's unit and Kurz's unit received big and small damages. Mao unit's head was half destroyed, Kurz unit's sniper cannon was destroyed.

At that juncture Clouseau and the others were confronting the three enemy units. No matter how they counterattacked the enemy did not take their bait. They stayed on a slightly elevated hill, glaring at them.

Basically the three units looked like the Codarl type ASes, but the details were different.

There was a higher volume on the upper half of the bodies. There were no ponytail-like radiation wires. Instead, extending from the back were blade like radiation planks. The power output was much different from the previous Codarls. They were massive silhouettes hiding nimbleness and ferociousness inside. You could say that their difference was like a Panther and a Lion-

The colors of the three units were also varied.

Black, White, Red.

One had an extra large Monomolecular cutter, another, a large Gatling cannon, and the last, a large caliber sniper cannon.

“Welcome, Remnants of Mithril. Thank you for taking care of me in San Francisco.” The center black AS said from its exterior speakers.

It was a voice that they knew.

“Fowler huh”

“That guy....”

“Looks like he wants to go head on”

Mao and Kurz voices were soaked in tension.

“I can only admire your struggle- but it’s already the feeling of being over. We won’t be negligent and make light of you. With the maximum amount of respect, we thought to challenge you without any shrewdness.”

“Aah? Didn’t you get scared?”

Intercepting Fowlers words, Kurz’s Head Submachine gun was set to full auto and fired. 12.7mm shells poured down on the

black AS, all of it was scattered in the bluish white light, repelling them like small raindrops.

“Oh dear me. I was thinking of being gentlemanly and stopping with the hostilities.”

Fowler smiled coldly.

“Rather such inelegance. Well then, are you prepared....”

They’re coming- Clouseau purposely did not say it out loud.

Each aiming at one M9, Fowler and the other ASes jumped at them simultaneously.



“It’s been a long time, Sagara Sousuke-kun.”

Leonard, looking down at Sousuke from the roof, said with a calm composure. Contrary to that expression, he did not smile. He seemed a bit melancholy for some reason as he quietly looked at Sousuke beside the heavily damaged M6. Covered with large drops of rain, his whole body was wet.

“Where is Chidori?”

“I don’t have that interest, like so. Weeping.”

“Shut up. If Chidori-”

“What if you shut up?” Leonard said with a penetrating cold voice. “Looking with up here with that completely uncomfortable attitude, you. Not fully knowing anything. You’re saying it like it’s your natural privilege, calling out like that. Why don’t you understand your arrogance?”

Which one is the arrogant one? that remark did not come out. Communication and discussion with the enemy was no longer necessary.

“Like I understand. Hand her over.”

“Oh well.”

Leonard let out a small snort, and glanced at Kalinin who was beside him.

“...well? As the leader of the defense force what would you do, Mister K?”

“Originally we planned to restrain Sagara and retreat- but we do not have the time. Mister Gold’s forces will be arriving soon. Although we can’t see much of them at this stand point but-”

Then Kalinin cut his speech, concentrating on the information from the earphone in his right ear.

“-it is as what you’ve heard. We have to start moving.”

“Showing your true character huh?”

Leonard narrowed his eyes, looking over the direction of the sea. From Sousuke’s position he could hardly see them, yet, even then the units- those unforgettable torsos... He looked at those indistinct silhouettes.

It was the Behemoth.

There were three of those giant ASes pushing their way through the waves of the sea, getting closer to the mansion. There were also a number of transport helicopters in the sky. Probably loaded with ASes inside.

Reinforcements from Amalgam?

No, its appearance was strange.

His confidence that they were not allies was confirmed immediately. The Behemoth, with a giant rifle cannon (artillery which was probably around 300mm), was aiming toward the mansion. The transport helicopters in the skies were also lowering from a high altitude, immediately descending towards them.

“It seems they want to do it.” Kalinin said.

“Right. Shall we give them a suitable reception?”

“Yes.”

“That’s right, I didn’t hear your answer. Then, what do you plan to do with him?”

Leonard looked at Sousuke. Kalinin also delayed. He looked at him without any hint of emotion.

“Shoot to death.”

“Fine.”

After saying that Leonard turned his body. That black coat- “Active bulletproof suit” - made him disappear into the terrace. Just before that, he added another command.

“At once.”

Kalinin did not reply to those words. He simply informed Sousuke.

“That’s how it is, Sagara. Die.”

“.....”

Sousuke immediately gave in.

Those eyes, that voice, were serious.

He had no intention of mercy. There were no hidden meanings. As for drama, or practice, or any other hidden intentions, there were none.

Andrei Kalinin was serious.

That man who he thought of as his father seriously intended to kill him-

“Wa-”

“Fire.”

The first shot from the shooter came. The shooter was not able to grasp his position and Sousuke immediately ducked into the shadows of the armor. Unbelievable. There was no mistake that the shot just now had the intent to kill.

The continuing shots from the surroundings were the same. There were countless numbers of shots being fired at the heavily damaged M6 and dazzling sparks scattered about.

“Lieutenant Commander!”

Even if he shouted there was no response.

It was not necessary to have communication with the enemy- he put this into practice.

“.....”

Sousuke slipped inside the armor, pushing the switch on the remote control he was gripping. It was the last mechanism which he had prepared when he got the M6. He transmitted the orders to the unit to fire all shots on the fixed armaments.

The remaining fixed armament of the M6, a 12.7mm machine gun, smoke grenade, and a compact personal landmine were spit out, gouging on the surface, blowing off the outer walls of the mansion. Fragments, flashes, flame, and smoke fiercely spread about. The enemy group surrounding the unit was in confusion. Getting caught himself in center of the small explosion, Sousuke immediately ran through. He went inside the nearby mansion. By jumping through the lockdown space there was still a chance...

Just before plunging into the nearest window, Sousuke saw on that terrace. Being perturbed by the fragments and bullets flying about the surrounding, Kalinin looked down on him.

Are you serious?

In that juncture, Sousuke questioned with only his eyes.

Kalinin directly caught that and merely moved his lips.

Try and stop me.

It looked like that was what he said.

There was no more time to try anything. In the direction of the window where he dived from, there were enemy infantry. Staying in the air together with the fragments of the broken window glass, he aimed at the first enemy and fired.

Right then, there was no other way but to fight.

At any rate he had to survive...



There were expressed concerns over the noise and vibration in the transport helicopter flying at a low altitude over the mountains.

No matter how long Lemon blasted the one in charge of communications, he only kept repeating “Cause unknown! Anyway we can’t connect to the channel!”

“Is it alright flying like this!?” Lemon yelled, scowling at the face of Old Man Courtney, who only replied “Like I know!”.

From the side, Colonel Seals interrupted.

“Don’t worry, don’t worry! Even if we get hit by the anti-aircraft cannons at this altitude we can make an emergency landing with the Auto Rotation! Do you know about the ‘Dead man’s Curve’!? It’s on top of that last moment-”

“The blast back then had no significance right!?”

“Young one, don’t worry about the details!”

“But, if I knew we would be flying recklessly like this, I would have objected-”

The unit suddenly jolted, Lemon bit his tongue.

“~! Aah, dammit! I don’t know about this!?”

After Lemon hurled his abusive language, he glanced at the oriental woman sitting beside him.

Even with the terrible flying she didn’t feel bad. The woman’s bluish face nodded with sullenness, glancing sidelong at the crouching thing in the cargo bay at the rear.

“Don’t mind. This guy can only be handled by that man.”

“Then, if Sousuke dies, this unit, Laevatein, what are you going to do with it!?”

“Throw it away or destroy it, choose what you like.” the woman muttered bluntly, calling out on her headset.

“....would that really be okay?”

And then a synthesized voice coming from the unit replied in a clam tone.

<Affirmative>



With a number of guards and Alastors surrounding the area, Kaname was taken into the corridor of the mansion.

She understood that the mansion was in the maelstrom of the battle. The sound of gunfire drew nearer and finally the sounds of the engine of a 2nd generation AS and the sound of guns firing and a fierce explosion echoed around the premises. Impacts and vibrations toppled the furniture, and the broken glass from the windows were scattered on the floor.

“Where are we going?”

The guard did not answer.

Even then she knew. The heliport- the one adjacent to the mansion’s garden. The large heliport. They were taking her there and escaping from that place.

“Who’s coming?”

As expected, the guards did not answer. Instead another voice replied.

“It’s him.”

From behind, Leonard appeared and told her. With his wet black coat fluttering, he paced quickly beside her. It was like being chased and hurrying to someplace far away.

“Him....?”

“That’s right, him.”

It's Sousuke-

While halting reminiscently, Leonard strongly grabbed her arm.

“Let go.”

“I can’t.”

Even though she swept it away, he did not let go. His grip wasn’t any different from the disciplined Sousuke’s. It might have even been stronger than Sousuke’s. Seemingly it was a strength without any hesitation.

“I...I--”

“What would you do if you see him? Embrace each other and run away?”

“.....”

“You are hesitating. You turned you back on him once, will you still go back to him now. He risked his life coming here, yet you’re still hesitating.”

What Leonard said was true.

Even though he came there, she was still indecisive. Why didn’t she shake her hand off much more violently, won’t she run towards the direction of the gunfire? Didn’t she want to see him?

Didn’t she want to plunge onto his chest?

That was not it. She wanted to see him, and wanted to embrace him.

“You still don’t fully understand yourself, right?”

Without saying anything she cast her eyes downward. Leonard silently looked at her. Coming out of the passage, they arrived in front of the heliport. There was one helicopter equipped with ECS already standing by, ready to take off. The deafening sound of the thundering engine resounded.

Would she be riding on that helicopter like that? And then going to another place. Towards some place where his hands could

not reach. That was not good. Then why was she continuing to be led by her arm like that?

Close to the ears of Kaname, who was asking herself that, Leonard leaned in.

“Then do you want to gamble on it?” he asked.

“Huh?”

He ordered his subordinates and Alastors to “go on ahead”. The Alastors immediately responded, but the subordinates hesitated.

“But...”

“Just go.”

Without any further protest, the subordinates headed towards the helicopter. On the verge of the heliport, both Kaname and Leonard remained at the entrance to the mansion. He casually took off his black overcoat, and let it fly from the strong winds generated by the helicopter. Like a crow flapping its wings, the overcoat disappeared into the dark night.

That bullet proof suit had the ability to reflect bullets and edged tools, Kaname knew that well. By that time she fully understood the mechanism. Created from the Muscle Package of the 3rd generation AS, it was a bullet proof ability combined with Shape Memory Polymer that was a few steps ahead of a Super Aramid Fiber, an “Active” bullet proof suit incorporated with a Super compact Radar element. Assassins that had once attacked her, and Sousuke who had attacked Leonard, it completely stopped all of those.

Discarding that overcoat, right then, he was similar to an ordinary person, in a state of complete defenselessness.

“Here.”

After saying that, Leonard took out a hand gun. Cocking it, he turned it around with his hand and handed it to her with the grip forward.

“Take this.”

It was a cold silver gun.

An old fashioned revolver- a gun with a rotary magazine. An elegant ornament was carved into it. Of course Leonard had a gun like that. It was like something straight out of a Western. Kaname had thought that Leonard had elegance about him, and was surprised by how awkwardly he handled the gun compared to an expert.

“Well?”

Being urged, Kaname spontaneously took the gun.

“What exactly do you mean-”

“I told you I want to gamble on it, didn’t I? Why don’t you try and shoot me with that gun.”

Leonard stood in front of the door.

“Sagara Sousuke-kun is over there. If you want to see him, all you have to do is shoot me to go. You have 30 seconds. That’s where it will be decided.”

“....are you serious?”

“I won’t make jokes like this. 25 more seconds.”

“You think I won’t shoot?”

“That’s why it’s a gamble.”

“I can shoot you in the legs. Then you’ll still be here.”

“Good idea. Please.”

He added a smile.

“10 more seconds”

Kaname held the gun with one arm, with her finger on the trigger, with the gun pointed before his eyes.

It was a scheme that was easy to understand.

Over there he was fighting. Behind Leonard. Going over there was simple. Just move the index finger a little, and take that man down. Take away many things from the man who had arrested her until then.

Her fingers stiffened. Her elbows were shaking.

He should be hateful. He should be someone who she wouldn't have to worry about killing. Perhaps, it was her first and last chance.

And yet-

"5 more seconds"

She couldn't shoot.

If it had been to strike with a kick, it would have been fine. She thought that she had already regained her vitality. Wasn't she proud of it? Sousuke and those impolite boys in the class, she had always struck them with a kick.

But, she couldn't shoot.

It was natural, the violence level was different. The essential meaning, intentionally hurting people... She couldn't erase their existence. She couldn't commit murder. She didn't have the experience. Kaname always "had it easy" from Sousuke.

It was because she was simply a woman. An ordinary one.

She didn't have the resolve to kill a person. She didn't possess it.

That was why, she couldn't shoot.

Sousuke was over there.

She could see through that man. Although regretful there was nothing that could be done.

No, could she really see through him? Why was it that right then she could not see a scared smile on his face? Even with the old hand gun she could not see with her eyes-

“Zero. Time is up.” Leonard said with his quick true character.

“I would have shot.”

“.....”

“He fights in order to see you, going about killing people. Even then, you can’t even shoot a ‘conceited bastard’ like me. In the end, your resolve is only up to that degree.”

“You’re mistaken.”

Taking hold of the gun without any strength, Kaname drew back. Leonard extended his hands towards her.

“Let’s go. I told you I wanted to show you something right?”

“That’s....”

“You lose. ----come on”

“Stop it....”

She did not think of anything. Her body only became stiff. She was only shaking off her grabbed hand. She made a fragile sound.

-that’s why.

-it was not her intention.

The muzzle pointed up, her finger pulled on the trigger. Quickly by a little. Causing the firing hammer to cause the single action pistol to fire, even with that amount of strength, it was enough.

A dry gunshot.

The flame of the discharge twinkled before her eyes. Her vision became completely white. The dull recoil in her right hand trembled. The rapid splattering of blood flew around, soaking her cheek red.



“Dammit....!”

The prepared weapon, a small mechanical cannon, slipped its way into his hand. Kurz hurled abusive language in the cockpit.

Kurz, Mao, and Clouseau- those three were being pressured into a hard fight.

Fowler’s three ASes equipped with Lambda Drivers were pressing their attacks hard with overwhelming power toward the three M9s.

As for mobility, power, cooperation and combat tactics it was completely different from the enemy Codarl types from before. They could not get hold of a chance to have good attacking conditions. On the contrary they were simply trying to not get killed. All they could do was run from place to place.

The black AS, Fowler’s unit, was equipped with monomolecular cutters on both hands. It was challenging in close combat. Clouseau, who was unparalleled in melee, was being overwhelmed by Fowler. On top of losing one hand, his opponent was equipped with a Lambda Driver. Although the numbers said Fowler had the advantage, Clouseau did not consider Fowler’s abilities to be that great.

The white AS was equipped with two giant Gatling cannons, from mid distance the shells shed like the rain. In spite of it being clumsily armed, the movements of that white AS were somewhat graceful, suggesting that it was a female pilot. Mao’s unit bore the full brunt of its attack, and was being nailed down into the shadows of the shelter. Mao often drew the short straw, but her comprehensive piloting techniques would not lose to Sousuke. Even then, she couldn’t make any move. She didn’t know who the pilot of the white AS was, but they had suitable skills.

And then the red AS-

It was equipped with a sniper cannon. He was a sniper, in other words a similar type to him.

In the first confrontation the sniper cannon of Kurz's M9 had been shot into two equal parts. It had not been designed to be used as a shield to protect his body. The enemy was aiming for his weapon to destroy it.

If the enemy aimed at his cockpit, one shot would have taken him down. Even then, his weapon had been purposely shot. Could it be that Fowler had ordered them to "send their greetings and avoid killing them"?

No, he didn't need to worry about their intentions.

That guy- the red enemy AS- was harassing him. By looking at the sniper cannon, being also a sniper, he fully understood that. The enemy fired that weapon precisely, ridiculing him.

"Aren't you very good...."

After muttering that, at the same time Kurz secretly shuddered at the ability of the red AS' pilot.

What skill.

He was no idiot. When he took the first shot, he was vigilant on the snipe and sufficiently maneuvered. For combat maneuvers of a 3rd generation AS, aiming only at the weapon and sniping from that distance... By common sense, it was not possible. A pilot capable of that feat, there were only a few in the world-

No.

"Impossible....?"

The doubt that floated his mind in that instant was erased by the enemy snipe. A precise shot aimed from a position barely hidden in the crevice of many trees, rocks, and slopes. The Femur armor of Kurz's unit had taken a hit from a shell.

"kuh!"

The AI reported about the damage. The drive system of the left femur was seriously damaged. His mobility was greatly declining. Continuing in combat maneuvers would be difficult.

He would be killed like that.

With not being able to use his own sniper cannon he couldn't do anything but die there.

“.....”

He resigned himself in a posture to take the next shot. But the shot never came.3 seconds, 4 seconds, after 10 seconds there was not a snipe.

Was the enemy still harassing him?

That's what he thought, but it was different. The enemy had withdrawn. Not only the red enemy AS that had driven Kurz into a corner, but the remaining two as well.

“.....?”

Without saying anything, Fowler and the others had departed at high speed, disappearing into the mountains and the raging winds of the night.

“They ran away. What exactly is-” Clouseau said over the wireless radio.

“What's the meaning of this?” Mao asked with a sigh mixed with relief

“I don't know, but seems like we narrowly escaped death” Kurz said with disgust.

Kurz and the other's battle, which had turned into a hard fight, had been suddenly postponed.



Sousuke was being chased inside the mansion. The men were persistently attacking him. They continually splashed bullets in the surrounding area, chasing him away to a single direction.

There was no pardon in the enemy's gunfire.

The attack rhythm of the enemy, the training, the scent of the cooperation in the enemy's movement... Sousuke knew it well.

Lieutenant Commander-

There was no mistake that it was Kalinin's command.

That man, who had been schooled by adversity in many battles, was not the type of commander that would rely on clever schemes. In Mithril, where the standard for surprise attacks dealing with equipment or information was variable, he had always chosen solid tactics.

He would not recklessly use diversionary tactics and ambushes. His unit was giving pressure from the right; there was no mistake that the right wing was the real threat. Even though it was a makeshift interaction they were not stalling or trying to gain time. The necessary figures and firepower had already been calculated. They were definitely tearing that mansion apart.

There were ordinary strategies most tacticians used, but Kalinin didn't see the practicality of such tactics. If you looked at baseball, without anticipating a homerun you could reliably earn points through hits and steals. It was a type of strategy that limited points via an excellent pitcher.

By Kalinin's tactics, bit by bit Sousuke was being cornered into the southern tip of the mansion. Since he had complete knowledge of Kalinin's habits he knew that that direction would be disadvantageous. Even then, if he tried to head into another direction, he couldn't.

Lieutenant Commander is serious. With those kinds of enemy movements Sousuke had to recognize that.

At any rate it was solid. From before the battle started, the match had already been decided. He couldn't move like that.

Of course the psychological shaking was effective. The temptation of easy victory and the observation of wishful thinking... he had no use for those.

Until the battle was finished and he returned home to take a sip of tea, he had to be careful and stay sharp. When it was time to win he would definitely win. When it was time to lose he would definitely skillfully lose. He was that kind of a man.

Kalinin, at that time, had certainly said it himself. "Try and stop me". After that he felt not even a single presence of mercy.

Why is it?

He really didn't know. He body automatically counterattacked, making repeated precise shots; but in his head, the betrayal of Kalinin kept swirling inside.

Why?

He was not that kind of man. He was cool-headed, clam, and sometimes he was definitely heartless, but he was not like *that*. More than that, he must be double crossing them...

Why am I so disturbed?

That self-consciousness was a distraction. Think later. Now he had to fight.

Suppressing his feelings, walking like he was sliding, he fired a restraining shot at the right-hand enemy. After moving to the nearby room it was a few seconds before a number of hand grenades were thrown inside.

Explosion.

Together with the impact white smoke hung around. Even under normal circumstances the bad field of vision had become zero. Riding on this opportunity, he stopped before going out the

nearby window. If it were the Lieutenant Commander there would definitely be a number of people waiting outside.

He walked to the opposite direction.

There were also enemies in there. While being aimed at with an infra-red scope, he fired his sub machinegun.

He was not able to twist his body in time. The enemy gunfire hit Sousuke. There was a dull pain in the upper left part of his body. He had taken a high caliber bullet. The AS pilot suit stopped all the bullets. If it had been a larger rifle bullet then he might have died.

He immediately fired back.

Although he hit their bodies, they immediately retreated into a hidden passage. They also had body armor. He could hear their abusive language.

Where's Chidori.....?

He concealed himself in the wooden bookshelf that had fallen. Changing his magazine, Sousuke nimbly patrolled the surroundings.

If she was around then she must have headed to the heliport. But, how did he break through the siege, and then go to her while she was being rigorously protected....?

There was a short time of hesitation. Magazine changed, he immediately moved, and then he was attacked by a huge shock. A few meters beyond where he was, enemy soldiers hidden in the wall were blown away. Even separated, Sousuke also felt the blast and, together with the scattered debris, he hit the floor.

“.....”

There was a buzzing in his ears. Raising his body, the rubble and dust piled up his back scattered down. Beside him was a big hole. Through it the sea breeze of the night entered the room.

The attack just now....

It was not an attack aimed at him. The destructive power was too great.

It was not an explosion used by infantry, and it was more than that of an AS or helicopter. He looked through the large hole in the wall. A number of helicopters circled the skies. The three Behemoth that he had seen earlier were closing in towards him. The rocket launchers equipped on their shoulders were firing sporadically.

They were attacking the mansion. Even though they were both part of Amalgam, the two sides were fighting? He really didn't know the reason. The American Military that was fighting in the north mountain district, the raid, exactly what was happening?

“I”

A Behemoth fired its cannons. Tearing off the corner of the mansion 30 meters away like a piece of paper. Debris and flames rained incessantly down on Sousuke's position.

No matter what the situation was, riding on the confusion he had to chase after Kaname. He somehow broke through the siege of the enemy. If he could quickly get to the heliport...



Lenard Testarossa fell down at Kaname's feet.

He laid down powerless on the right side of his body. Blood flowed from his head turning into a twinkling puddle and dying his silver hair scarlet.

“That...”

With her knees shaking, Kaname, who could still hear the sound of gunshots faraway, peered sluggishly at Leonard, who lay motionless, like he was sleeping. The bullet of the pistol that had unexpectedly discharged had bored deeply into Leonard's forehead.

Is he dead....?

In an instant, a hand that was colder than ice gripped at her heart. But, placing her trembling fingertips on the nape of his neck, she felt a faint pulsation.

He was not dead yet.

Certainly he had been hit by the bullet, but the angle was shallow. Kaname shook Leonard's elbow, knowing that there would be no response. She started looking around for something that might help.

What now? Should she stop the bleeding? Should she sterilize it? Should she do artificial respiration and heart massage? She couldn't even guess. With AS, other weapons, communication system, and artificial intelligence, she would know very well how to fix them, but she couldn't think of anything about emergency medical treatment. Even with the state of her unusual knowledge, she could not do anything.

No-

Kaname returned to her senses.

In the first place, why would treatment be necessary? Originally, she was supposed to shoot him and move forward.

The guards, who had sensed the accident, got out of the helicopter and headed in her direction.

I have to run away....now

That was what she was thinking. There was a large distance from the heliport to her. If she were to run away then, the guard would not be able to make chase....!

“Wait!” one of the guards cried.

Kaname changed her mind. She would jump inside the mansion. Then run straight. And then shout with a loud voice “Sousuke!” If she did that, he-

But, her feet would not move.

It was like her sandals were strongly glued in place, clinging to the ground. She couldn't move.

“.....”

She took a glance at Leonard, who was still collapsed. Blood flowing, Leonard was lying down in the middle of the rain. His eyes faintly opened. From that position he looked up at Kaname, who was standing still in shock. Why was there calmness in those eyes, and at the same time an awful pity?

Was it because of the pain from the injury, or could it have been something else?

-shoot

-I violated a rule.

She could no longer tear herself from her location. In her isolation she had gotten strange. She had struggled with giving the final blow. The guilt of running away would have been too much.

How long was there hesitation? The moment she noticed, the guards were already a few steps away, with guns in hand, aiming at her.

Her hesitation had been her fatal shackles.

“Drop the pistol. Hurry” the man said.

Kaname only then realized that she was still gripping Leonard's pistol.

“Eh....”

Kaname, who unintentionally pivoted her shoulders, felt her heart thudding in her chest. Looking over her shoulders she saw Andrei Kalinin's large frame beside the door.

“Where do you plan to go?”

“I-”

Looking at the pistol Kaname was holding and the profile of Leonard who was lying down, there was a sadness to the indifferent eyes of the Russian. But that was only for an instant.

Kalinin immediately returned to his usual expressionless face. He casually took the silver pistol.

“We’re escaping. Take her.”

The guard pushed Kaname, kneeling beside Leonard. Even though he had been injured he managed to whisper something. She couldn’t hear what it was.

“Ah....”

There was a downpour of incessant rain. The exploding sound of the helicopter, the fierce gunshots, and the flames of explosions could be heard here and there. Kaname was being taken into the vortex.

Three ASes appeared from nowhere, guarding the heliport and transport helicopter from three directions. There was black, white, and red coating. The black one was probably Fowler, the white one Sabina was piloting. The one piloting the red one was unknown.

Kaname was familiar with those units. There was data about those units in the PC Notebook. They were a type called Eligor, and were equipped with Lambda Drivers. The basic frame was the Codarl type, but the generator and engine were reinforced. It was an unsatisfactory electronic device with performance that was at the level of an M9.

Kaname was being carried by the male guards, and was thrown into the guest seat of the helicopter. The injured Leonard was also carried by Kalinin.

The engine of the helicopter roared, slowly taking off. The three ASes were repeatedly making return fire, exchanging hostilities with the “enemy military” from somewhere. Before long the three ASes also departed from the heliport, accompanying them by the leaping from the ground. They started to move at high speed towards the northwestern direction.

Kaname was looking down from the window of the rising helicopter.

There, she saw one person running on the heliport. The violent wind blew on the surrounding flames and because of the thick black smoke and the darkness of night she could not see his face clearly.

Black hair. Black AS pilot suit.

That alone was not clear. But it was enough.

“Sousuke....?”

In a twinkle far away, a very small Sousuke was calling out something. She couldn’t read the movements of his lips. Even then, what he said, she could clearly guess.

A simple word.

“Chidori!”

That’s was what he was shouting. At least on that level, she was thinking of how stupid she was, and was filled with a strong regret.

She couldn’t run away anymore.

Why hadn’t she run away immediately?

She even had the chance.

Why did she hesitate?

Why- she looked at Leonard, who was receiving medical treatment, from a corner of the room- couldn’t she have left him behind and run out....?

More than that, why wasn’t she resisting and crying “No! Let me off!”....?

The helicopter was accelerating. Sousuke’s appearance disappeared into the black smoke. She saw him falling onto his knees, pounding on the surface with his fist. That sight fiercely shook her heart.

The Behemoth that landed on the coast did not fire at the helicopter. They most probably wanted to capture her and Leonard alive.

She couldn't do anything anymore. It was the same as before, being obedient like a doll-

No. That was not it.

It was certain that she was not able to meet him, but there was still something that she could do. It was something she had already prepared for because she had done it recently.

That's right, just a little more-

Kalinin was having a discussion with the cabin crew. The other men also did not see Kaname.

She'd try.

She glanced at the pistol holster at the hips of the soldier who was seated nearby.



Sousuke kept chasing the helicopter that flew away with his eyes. Over the lines of the mountain its form disappeared. He still continued to glare at the Northwestern sky.

It was already useless.

Although he only said it to himself, he permitted himself to let out a curse.

“Dammit...”

Kaname was in that helicopter. He saw her once in the window. He could barely see the short person with long blue hair, but she had been looking over at him.

Chidori.

If I meet you there are a mountain of things I want to say to you. If I'm rejected, then that would be fine. But, I want to talk to you. That is why I came this far-

Sousuke, standing still in shock at the center of the heliport, was surrounded by soldiers. They were not the subordinates of Kalinin. They were the company which had invaded the mansion together with the Behemoths.

As far as he could see there were at least 10 men.

Since he had a good view of his surroundings he could tell there was absolutely no way to resist. All around a large scale of troops had been deployed and the three Behemoths were still in the sea. Even if Kurz and Mao were alright, they couldn't possibly get near a dangerous place like that. Thinking of a way to escape was stupid.

Won't we be able to meet anymore, Chidori?

Feelings of fruitless effort and despair weighed heavily on his shoulders.

"Are you Sagara Sousuke?" the man, who was apparently the commander, asked.

"....."

"Drop your weapons. We have mountains of questions for you. But if you want to die, then now would be a good time. We are very particular in the treatment of prisoners of war."

The surrounding soldiers made short laughs.

Sousuke slowly looked around at their vulgar smiles, and said something to cast aside.

"Do as you wish."

At that time, a few hundred meters away from the heliport, a single large helicopter suddenly appeared; the exploding sound of the engine and rotor roared.

"Huh!?"

MH-53. It was the one that Old Man Seals had carried the M6 with, that helicopter. The large helicopter quickly got close, turning its portside steeply.

“Sousuke, duck!” Lemon’s voice shouted from the exterior speakers.

Exposed from the port side of the helicopter, a Mini gun, a Vulcan machine gun, showered the soldiers with violent shots. The surrounding water splashed wildly. The soldiers dropped, falling down, and ran away puzzled.

Lemon and the others came running in. But it was reckless. Hovering at point blank range the enemy Behemoths would attack at once. Of course, being an ordinary helicopter, it had no capability of attacking the Behemoths or an AS.

Running past the chaos in the confusing raid at the heliport, Sousuke called out on the wireless radio.

“That’s enough, Lemon. Get away immediately! The operation is a failure!”

And then the voice of Old Man Courtney disciplined him over the wireless radio.

“What are you talking about! Don’t you understand, can’t you wind up your ass before giving up!”

“What are you talking about-”

Then another voice, the sound of a woman he remembered, interrupted.

“Sagara! We’re dropping the Laevatein now! Use it as you like!”

“Laeva....what?”

That person was an agent belonging to Mithril’s Intelligence Division, Wraith.

“Laevatein! That’s what he calls himself though!”

“At this height- I don’t care!”

“Just drop it!”

“Yeah, geez!”

The cargo hatch of the helicopter in the sky opened. Inside that hatch was a large black lump slipping down. With the darkness of night and smoke he couldn't see it clearly, but it was most probably an AS.

The helicopter turned and was hit by multiple shots from by the enemy. Fire suddenly erupted. The smoke scattered like a spiral and the helicopter started to stall.

Over the wireless radio, he could hear the fierce noises of Courtney and the other's screams and jeers.

“.....!”

Lemon and the other's transport helicopter passed over Sousuke's head, sinking left and right, making an emergency landing in the garden. There was a loud thundering sound. The rotor that had broken off turned in the sky, blowing up in a cloud of dust. His friends inside might not be alright. And he didn't know about the two elderly men.

And then-

The other object dropped. It was the unidentified AS that Lemon and the others had delivered. It was very light while in mid-air. Before Sousuke's eyes it landed approximately 10 meters away. A smooth and secure landing.

“.....”

The whirled up splashes of water were very clear. Illuminating in the burning flames of its surrounding, he could clearly see the whole detail of the kneeling AS that had just landed in front of him.

This unit is....?

Its armor was wet from the rain.

It had a smart and tightened silhouette. It was a 3rd generation AS similar to the M9.

The closest unit would be- the Arbalest. His favorite unit that had been destroyed in Tokyo; Mithril's only Lambda Driver equipped AS. It had a sharp resemblance on the ARX-7 Arbalest. But that unit had more volume than the Arbalest. Its arms and feet were reassuring and audacious. Its power and sudden exploding ferociousness seemed legendary. Above the shoulder armor there were large cannons equipped. They were a size that ordinary ASes would not be able to carry, like a tank which was equipped with heavy equipment.

The armor's color was white. No, its basic coating was white, but there were some points that were coated red. It was a little dark, but it was like a bursting blood red.

Compared to the white and blue coating of the Arbalest, which suggested wind and ice, the unit's red color in various places was like burning flames.

Flame of anger.

Flame of battle.

A color that governed with the strength of energy and attacking.

Sousuke instantly forgot that he was in a battlefield and, dumbfounded, looked up at that unit.

<It's been a long time, Sergeant> a very nostalgic voice informed him from the exterior speakers.

Lacking intonation, it was a short male voice. It was a synthetic sound created by the unit's AI.

"...is that you AI?"

<Affirmative. However this unit is called ARX-8 Laevatein. Sergeant Sagara, requesting permission to return to your war.>



素性不明のASは、
宗介の眼前に着地した。
「お久しぶりです、軍曹殿」

An AS of unknown origin landed before Sousuke's eyes. "It's been a long time, Sergeant."

That's right. The fighting hadn't started yet. He could still make chase. If he were to be paired up with that guy-

“Of course. Permission granted.”

<It is my honor. Let us save the details for later. First get on board.>

That unit, the Laevatein, extended its left hand. A number of enemies were shooting their way. Its armor was being hit by shells and sparks were flying. Sousuke jumped into the hand of the AS, turning to the back side of the unit without difficulty.

<A new armor and it is immediately damaged. Somehow, I wanted to have a more elegant first campaign.>

“....your chattering is the same as usual”

<It's been months, I haven't talked to anyone and it was boring.>

“Really.....”

What pride. Not worrying about disadvantages.

Sousuke snorted his nose, sliding into the opened hatch. There was no change in the cockpit from the M9 or the Arbalest. Gripping the stick a number of times and listening, he confirmed the condition.

The hatch closed. Start up procedures were initiated. Master mode, establishment of the Bi-lateral angle, everything was completed quickly.

“Well then....”

On the front screen the information indicated that the enemy infantry were persistently firing upon them, and then that the giant Behemoths had noticed their existence and were prepared to attack. The normal sized enemy ASes, Codarl types, were also deployed.

<Warning. Enemy AS. Behemoth types, three units, Codarl types, three units. Heavily armed infantry about two squads.>

If it were an ordinary AS, its combat power would be no match. Even a single unit of Behemoth would have caused him trouble, much less three.

However-

“Firstly, shall we go berserk?”

Sousuke breathed deeply, gripping the stick.

In the last half year it was an excitement that he hadn’t felt. No, it was the omnipotent feeling that exceeded theory he had had after the battle in Hong Kong. The hidden power of the unit was responding. Since Tokyo, he had always been continuously fighting a hard battle. But this unit had leveled the playing field.

There were six powerful ASes?

Fine. But wouldn’t it become a bloodbath?

The unit, the AI, and even his own blood boiled with fearless fighting spirit.

“Alright. Let’s finish this in 3 minutes.”

<It is impossible in three minutes. It is at least 4 minutes 12 seconds>

“Shut up. Let’s go....”

<Roger, Sarge.>

It was time for battle maneuvers. Kicking the ground, evidently the sword of flames, the Laevatein leapt towards the enemy.

Chapter 5: Sword of Flame

That Codarl's pilots were harboring a discontent from having no enemies present. The troops were members of a unit whose leader went by the name "Mr. Gold".

In the briefing before the operation, they heard that the mansion had at least three Codarls similar to their own. They would be Lambda Driver equipped ASes ready to defend the mansion. It was also explained that they may come across a situation where they would exchange hostilities with a developed AS called an Eligor, which had exceeding capabilities.

Aside from the equipment of the Codarl, their attack targets were similar to their own Amalgam troops.

They were allies, so to speak, so there was no need to go easy on them. It would be good to break the security of the mission. Even if it were to be called cannibalism, for a mercenary, if they had the liberty to pillage, they would like that scenario. They had already forgotten about the problems they would face from taking medicine prior to the operation. And, because of the overwhelming performance of their Codarls, they felt unsatisfied by the recent one-sided battle.

However, even after opening the lid, so to speak, there was no resistance whatsoever.

The enemy units had anticipated the hostilities and appeared. They seemed like they would make difficult opponents. But the Eligors could only be seen for a short amount of time, then they immediately retreated.

How boring, there was nobody to kill.

Their spirits, whose agitation and concentration were heightened at the time, could feel a kind of hunger.

At that time, a single unidentified helicopter flew around. The helicopter tried to attack and scatter the infantry. It had arrived at the target position rather quickly; the allied giant AS, Behemoth, shot them down.

Their hunger swelled up once more.

How boring. Give some more prey. Give something to kill. Prepare an opponent that can resist while desperately running away. Swinging steel and polymer limbs, a helpless enemy that would gallantly fire a powerless 40mm barrel.....!

An alarm sounded.

The units' sensors captured a single AS on the edge of the mansion. It had been thrown off from the shot down helicopter.

They switched to Night Vision mode.

Its silhouette was determined to be a 3rd generation AS that was close to the M9. It was nothing. Just an M9. It was no match for the Codarls.

Infra-red mode.

The heat signature of the kneeling unit did not correspond to that of the M9. Also, the assumed output of the rising generator of the unit was-

“4800.....!?”

Estimated, 4800 Kilowatts.

Two times the standard level of a 3rd generation AS. That was no longer the level of a ground weapon. By far it was an output of a large scale fighter or battleship....!

In the direction of the smoldering rain, the appearance of the white unit was slowly shown. Various parts of the unit appeared gloomy, even feverish, and shone a burning red. The surrounding atmosphere was distorted by the heat. Its boiling appearance trembled and danced in the middle of the flames.

There were orders from the command unit.

“All units. Attack the landed enemy AS on the heliport. Use whatever means necessary. Attack that enemy AS at once....!”

Before they could answer “Roger”, the enemy AS stirred.

Glancing at them in its kneeling posture, it slinked its light body, saving its energy. With only mere movements, all the allied ASes sensed something would be starting.

“....I repeat. Immediately attack that enemy AS....”

Bursting open like a burning flame, the enemy AS leapt.



With the first leap, Sousuke’s consciousness disappeared with uncertainty.

With tremendous G-force there was a feeling that all his blood was pumped into his feet. His field of vision narrowed and became totally dark. Enduring the pain, he gripped the stick.

“.....!!”

His consciousness barely connected, he turned to glance at the G meter and altimeter above the screen. The instant gravity acceleration had been no less than 30Gs. It was almost similar to the circumstances of an aircraft. His body could endure the instant G-force, but it would not be easy. His current height was 80 meters. The heliport, which had been there just a few seconds ago, was now under his eyes.

What is this AS?

What kind of power is this?

He did not have the time to say those words. He drew quickly to the ground in a landing posture, waving his limbs. He had landed on the outskirts of the mansion. The pavement that had been destroyed by the impact scattered in the surroundings like a land mine had exploded.

“What is this, this is....!” Sousuke said breathlessly, enduring the impact of the landing.

<Training Message. Please define the subject of “This”> AI said with an inorganic voice.

“This unit’s jumping ability and the established--”

<Kidding. Quite a thing, is it not?>

“You.....!”

Sousuke smacks his lips. AI put aside his non-versatile common AI act.

<Forgive me. Actually there has been no satisfactory test run and operation>

“What was that?”

<With a restricting environment, this unit was constructed in secrecy. I also requested operational tests for ground maneuvering, but Mr. Hunter rejected with, ‘we don’t have the time or place for that’>

“Hunter. Gavin Hunter?”

<Affirmative>

That man who had been the Hong Kong Branch Head of Mithril’s Information Department had been involved with the unit. It was the first time that Sousuke had heard about it. Since that female agent, Wraith, had brought the unit, it seemed that the construction of the ARX-8 Laevatein had involved Mithril’s Information Department.

An alarm sounded.

An enemy AS, a Codarl type, hurriedly got closer. Its weapon was the standard 35mm Rifle.

“.....”

Sousuke prudently operated his unit.

The Laevatein lightly stepped to the left, evading the enemy's attack. The incoming shells split the pavement, pulverizing a nearby storehouse.

“Well, you can use that of course!?”

<The Lambda Driver?>

“Yes!”

<Who knows....>

Sousuke's movement had an exhausted feeling and he was losing his balance. Frankly, the Laevatein's movements looked stupid. The enemy attacked. He continued to make evasive maneuvers.

“What do you mean ‘who knows’!?”

<No. At any rate there is nothing that can be used. I cannot irresponsibly affirm->

An enemy shell grazed at their femur. Their shoulders were also superficially shot. *Klunk*, a fierce impact attacked.

“.....!”

<Warning. Approaching!>

The enemy unit took out its monomolecular cutter and immediately drew near. There was no time to react. If only he could select a weapon...

Sousuke smacks his lips and called out.

“I don't care, try it!”

<By all means>

Immediately, two gravitational fields stopped the opponent's charge. Atmosphere distorting, the white smoke and fragments of the rubble mixed up in a swirl. The projected hand of the Laevatein had stopped the monomolecular cutter of the Codarl.

It was operational.

With only that he clearly understood. In the gravitational field created by the enemy he could feel his own power pushing

back. No, he could still go further. He could counter attack. With that overwhelming power-

“.....”

The Laevatein seized the monomolecular cutter like a piece of wood, pulling it from the enemy unit with a jerk. The units got close to each other, eye to eye, sensor to sensor. The enemy unit's head moved, and he could see a faint fear.

He moved its right hand. Pulling on the manipulator control wheel, and made a fist. Taking hold of the large hips he punched through the enemy's abdomen. There was an indifferent spark. The Laevatein broke through the gravitational field of the Codarl and tore up the abdomen armor. It grasped the internal generator and pulled it out. A number of cables extend like entrails. Gripping the nuclear fusion battery with sparks flying, he kicked the unit in the abdomen. The Codarl that had lost its power blew up into two equal parts.

The fragments of the titanium alloy, the jet of water from the shock absorbers, the burning flames. All danced fiercely in front of the Laevatein's eyes.

One unit destroyed.

It had that much destructive power with only its bare hands.

<Success. Managed to do something unexpected.>

“But with such a cold sweat....!”

<Starting enforced refrigerant>

The Laevatein's head sharply opened, from inside a volume of hair gushed out. It was similar to the ponytail of the Codarls, but its expansion was like “extending”. It had the vigor of a large volume of boiling water gushing out from the water tap.

A medley of rising atmospheric current drifted from the “hair”, and particles of dimly white light scattered. The Laevatein, in a kneeling posture, searched for a new prey.

There was a reaction from the optical sensor. Finally the two other Codarls drew close.

“What about weapons?”

<There are all sorts. How about this for a start>

There was an indication from the equipped control panel.

On the unit’s simple diagram, on one knee, blue flickering letters read “GRAW-4/MMC”. A large monomolecular cutter. It was a developed model from the GRAW-2 that the M9 used.

“Fine”

<Roger>

The knee armor of the Laevatein that looked largely unbalanced, stowed the folded monomolecular cutter. One knee armor opened, and sparks scattered from the monomolecular cutter. The Laevatein, gripping the handle, reassuringly pulled it out, with its left and right stance like a giant eagle spreading its wings. With only that movement there was a squall on the ground’s surface. The spiraling mud gave off the sensation of a whirlwind. The GRAW-4 monomolecular cutter instantly opened from the storage position, sword blade making a short howl.

<M3 approaching. 10 o’clock, distance 1>

That Codarl, which they had designated M3, had large monomolecular cutters in both hands. It was closing in with a skillful battle maneuver. The other unit, M2, drew near from his blind spot on the right hand side. They were coming at the same time-

<I will take on M2>

“Huh?”

<Continue with the battle>

There was no more room for conversation after that.

To his front was a unit with two swords. Sousuke manipulated the unit, striking the enemy Codarl right in the front.

The gravitational field generated by the Lambda Driver clashed and the Plasma in the atmosphere let out a shine.

“.....!”

The other Codarl, M2, drew close from behind. Both of Laevetai's arms were already plugged up, but there was a rapid expansion from under both weapons racks, and small manipulators appeared.

Hidden arms.....!?

Moving the extended limbs with just one pilot in the unit? In theory it couldn't be done. But for those arms it was like another pilot was controlling them, showing clever movements. The pair of hidden arms grabbed the hand grenade from the hip's hard point and threw them in succession to the Codarl that was drawing close from behind.

There was an explosion. The posture of the enemy from behind that was suddenly struck was pulled down, delaying the attack timing. At that moment Sousuke skillfully manipulated his original arms, handling the slash from the enemy up front. He knocked it off balance and did a light foot sweep.

No, it was not only a foot sweep.

With the superfluous power of the Laevatein, it was a vigorous explosion that broke off the leg of the enemy unit.

That Codarl made a half revolution with its abdomen as a center, sparks scattering from its head rubbing on the ground, and stopped nearby on a number of cars.

He turned around with a light leap towards the other unit, which had run incessantly from the explosions from the hand grenade. He pressed on a straight line. In desperation, the enemy unit fired. Sousuke glared at the muzzle. With only that, the shells snapped before his eyes.

A flash on the right. And continued to the left.

He cut the Codarl with an “X”. The torn-to-pieces arms spun and rotated, falling down to the ground.

2 units destroyed.

The remaining unit, who had been foot swept, was unsteady and raising its body in the corner of his field of vision. Did he still intend to fight? No, he intended to run-

<Please allow me>

At the same time Al said that, the hidden arm on the left side pulled out an anti tank dagger from the elbow, letting it loose towards the front of his chest. Having full knowledge of Sousuke’s movement habits, it had superb timing.

“Hm”

Sousuke moved his unit snorting his nose, grasping the anti tank dagger in midair by the side. With a sharp motion, he threw it at the last Codarl. The enemy unit’s Lambda Driver’s gravitational field stopped the single attack- but lost to the push of the opposing gravitational field.

The anti tank dagger made a direct hit in the torso. The sound of crushing metal echoed and, together with a flash, the Codarl was smashed.

3 units destroyed.

Sousuke landed with a turn. Following the movement of the Laevatein, the radiation cord at the back of its head proceeded to make an arc, scattering sprays of light.

“What was that, these arms?”

<Support arms. Attack support, magazine change, please make use of these detailed functions. I will be the one controlling them.>



“Four arms huh. How disgusting....”

<I like it. In this circumstance, please neglect as much as you like>

“.....”

The remaining main forces of the enemy were the three Behemoths. The incredibly giant ASes. One of them, the Behemoth closest to the coast, was gazing at the Laevatein.



By karma, the transport helicopter that Lemon and the others were one was unusually tough. For more than 30 years its design had been repeatedly forged and modified with actual combat; it was not easily damaged and destroyed.

“I told you didn’t I!? We won’t die that easily!”

Hiding in the shadows of the damaged unit, Old Man Courtney called out in a loud voice.

“Eeh, Geez!”

Without losing to the surrounding gunfire and explosive sounds, Lemon returned the shouting.

“We’re surrounded by the enemy like this; I don’t see the significance as to why we’re being killed bit by bit!”

Lemon’s lamentation was extreme. After the emergency landing there had been no casualties. Even for those who had been riding in their helicopter there were no fatalities. Turning sideways in the garden, the crushed helicopter was surrounded by enemy soldiers. From the shadows of the unit came the gallant return fire from Lemon and the others. Because they couldn’t find a chance to escape, their ammunitions were slowly being reduced.

“No- Remember Kesan Base! Shoot, shoot! Wa----
hahahaha!”

An eccentrically high Courtney was shooting a submachine gun.

“Kesan huh. That was a terrible battle” Old Man Seals muttered offended, with carbine gun in hand.

“Hey, I’ve been accompanying you because you said something about transporting safely but- why are we in a large rural area in Mexico and being dragged into a desperate shoot out?”

The Oriental woman, whose identity was unknown, was firing a sub machine gun with one hand. Although she was called “Wraith”, nobody really knew who she was, or whose side she was affiliated with.

The contact with Wraith had immediately followed Sousuke witnessing the attack of the US military. Standing by in the extremities of the deserted village, she was riding on a large trailer in a remote wasteland. In front of Lemon and the others with vigilant guns, that woman, Wraith, got out unarmed, with the headlights behind her, and called out, “Is Sagara Sousuke there!? I have something to give him!”

It would be a strange request for a trap, and it seemed that she knew a great deal about Sousuke. Lemon and the others peeped into the container without completely understanding. The AS in the cargo was a 3rd generation AS which they had never seen before.

“Believe it or don’t, it’s up to your own accord. If you are going, then take this unit” Wraith had informed Lemon and the others.

They asked her why she knew of their standby point. She had answered, “I didn’t know. Al said it was here.”

Without any more information there had been no reason to refuse. Lemon and the others loaded the new AS in the helicopter, accompanying Wraith, and then flew towards the mansion-

“I didn’t know that there were this many dreadful enemies. We’ll die. We will definitely die” Lemon yelled to the night sky, hiding in the shadows of the duralumin.

“You don’t know that, young one!” Courtney said.

“Just watch. That Sagara, he already defeated three units.”

“Ah, it’s true.”

There was a big explosion in the corner of the orchard a few hundred meters from their crash point. The enemy AS which had been attacked by that red AS, Laevatein, was crushed by an anti tank dagger.

“I don’t know if it’s some sort of lamb, but I haven’t seen such violent power from a unit before. But it has a good rhythm in its movements. Is it really his first time getting on that unit? It looks like a favorite unit that he was accustomed to.”

“I guess it’s like that. For Sagara, that unit is like an old wife” Wraith said cowering from the splashes of bullets from nearby.

“But, how will he fare with Behemoth as an opponent....”

They glanced at the Super Giant AS Behemoth that was repeatedly scattering shots at the coast. The Behemoth shook violently in its giant size and started aiming at the Laevatein on the ground. At the same time both shoulders, both arms, and all the fire power equipped in its head were fired. Various sizes of machine guns, rocket missiles, and anti tank missiles covered the Silhouette of the white AS.

“Oh no”

With the barrage at that distance, there was no time to make evasive maneuvers. Moving bit by bit the Laevatein lost its balance from the blast and shots, and could be seen toppling on its knees. The Behemoth charged in with its giant size with

unimaginable speed, taking one big step forward, trampling down on the Laevatein with its right foot.

There was a thundering roar. Large amounts of sand whirled up.

It was like a child facing a tidal wave. The Laevatein was by all means trampled by the Behemoth.

“Aah....!”

Lemon let out a despairing noise; Courtney also concealed his brow and caught his breath. However, Wraith was different. She opened her slit eyes without a cloud of anxiousness, and an excited tone of voice leaked from her throat.

“No. Look carefully....”

From the other side of Behemoth’s foot, which trampled on the ground, light particles were revealed. The roaring sounds of the radiation system echoed and the surrounding atmosphere flickered like a blaze.

“That’s....?”

“Ross & Humbleton, PRX-3000. An experimental super high output generator. Power exceeding that of a ground weapon’s level, if it were to increase the power of the Lambda Driver-”

The body of the Behemoth leaned. Right foot about to swing, the form of the Laevatein hidden in the other side of the foot slowly appeared.

“Wha....”



The Laevatein was not smashed. After stopping the foot of the Behemoth with both arms, red light particles were surging throughout its whole body and it slowly lifted the giant enemy.

The unit howled and alarms were sounding. The generator's output was being pushed to the MAX. The cooling system was also functioning at its highest level. The electricity running through the electromagnetic muscles was sparking; the whole body was surging like lightning. Both feet were slowly sinking into the ground and the whole frame was screaming.

<The current estimated load is roughly 1500 tons> Al informed with his usual voice. <Although it is not yet referenced, this is approximately 30 times the standard load of a main tank. In other words, the load limit on top of the design has already been exceeded. Sergeant, you have to escape at once>

“Shut, up....!” Sousuke groaned, enduring the pain.

With the influence of the Lambda Driver, the fierce weight was giving feedback to his nervous system.

“If that was possible, I would have done so a long time ago....”

Bearing the pressure with desperation, Sousuke drew a short breath, putting all his strength into his lower abdomen.

“.....”

The gravitational field from the Laevatein shined red hot. In an instant it created an explosive strength and he pushed the trampling foot of the Behemoth with all his might. Impact. The giant's right ankle was crumpled and crushed. The Behemoth's balance was pulled down and it overturned upwards.

“Let's finish it!”

<Roger>

Pulling out the monomolecular cutter housed in his knee, the Laevatein leapt. Aiming at the Behemoth's head, he drew a short parabola in the air, violently thrusting the monomolecular cutter gripped in his hand into the nape of the enemy's neck.

He tore its armor and broke through its gravitational field, encroaching upon its interior with the sword blade.

Then two strikes, three strikes.

Sparks and oil scattered like a waterfall. The head cockpit was torn and detached, the Behemoth lost power.

<The fourth unit destroyed> Al informed.

The remaining two Behemoths could be seen from the coast. One unit was several hundred meters away; the other was a few kilometers.

The nearer Behemoth fired. The Laevatein's body fluttered, hiding in the shadows of the armor of the enemy unit it had just defeated. 30mm shells and Plastic explosives hit his surroundings. Violent flames and detonations appeared.

"I don't want what just happened....! Are there any other weapons?"

<Leave it to me. Here it is.>

There was an indication on the control panel. The symbols of the artillery mounted in the back flickered.

"Demolition Gun. 165mm....!?"

It was natural for Sousuke's voice to be excited. From the size of a 165mm shell it was unthinkable that it would be an AS' weapon. The standard rifle an AS used was 40mm. Sousuke's favorite Boxer shot canon was 57mm. Kurz's largest Sniper smooth-bore gun used in sniping was 76mm. The comparatively destructive artillery used by a tank was 120mm. It was a weapon that was fired from the level of a tank exceeding 50 tons. For a 10 ton AS...

"Is it not an artillery used by engineers?"

The Demolition Gun was originally used to remove unwanted buildings and structures by crushing them. But by having his unit equipping it, it was purely for combat.

<This firearm is for combat. The explosion and recoil is extraordinary please be careful. It cannot be fired without the Lambda Driver.>

His arms established a support point and the short barrel of the large caliber Demolition Gun turned from under his right shoulder, moving into firing position. Even with the size being reflected on the screen, it could be perceived as being extraordinary.

However, could that Big Lug-

“Can it fire....?? Sousuke muttered while operating the arm, testing the condition of the Demolition Gun.

<Unknown. No test shot has been made>

“But, nothing can be done but to do it.”

<That is correct>

“Fine.”

The Laevatein, with demolition gun at the ready, leaned on the wreckage of the Behemoth, jumping towards where the enemy landed.

Immediately the enemy Behemoth fired. A number of flashes made his eyes dizzy. The Lambda Driver repelled the unavoidable enemy shells.

Not that simple....!

He landed and immediately jumped, spinning in midair. Anti-AS missile were drawing near. The Gatling gun in his head fired on full auto. It was an ambush attack that shook all his limbs. The power of the Lambda Driver converted to a sharp parabola. He evaded the enemy barrage. The distance from the enemy was approximately 200 meters.

If it can be taken in close proximity....

He leapt a third time on the short rail. There was a violent impact and tremendous G-force. The enemy unit's feet pushed out,

passing through the length of its legs. Dawn was breaking and he shot through the slit in the rear looking up-

“Not yet....!”

The Laevatein made a forward somersault, kicking the sand on the coast and making a perpendicular splash. He twinkled in the eye of the re-aimed Behemoth overhead, making a revolution in midair. He flew to the vicinity of the back of the giant AS' head.

The enemy's Lambda Driver howled. The Laevatein rushed on the gathered focal point of the gravitational field. Normally the shockwave would blow him to pieces. However-

“!”

Concentrate. The gravitational field of the Laevatein stopped the enemy's gravitational field, eluding like the wind. Demolition Gun in one hand, the muzzle broke through the back of the enemy's head and he pulled the trigger with full spirit.

Flash and impact exploded before their eyes. The high explosive broke through the armor of the enemy and penetrated deep, exploding in the center. The 165mm cannon created absurd recoil and the unit floated away a few meters.

“....uh!”

Balance destroyed, the Laevatein tumbled down the back of the Behemoth.

<Success>

Only the information from AI could be heard. The limbs of the unit shook quickly and he landed on the sandy beach in a standing position.

“How was it....!?”

<Like I said, success>

Rising from the Behemoth were large quantities of black smoke spewing out from the upper part of the body, slowly falling

forward. After losing the automatic operation capability of the Lambda Driver's gravitational field, the enemy unit fell to pieces. The collapsing unit swirled into an infinite number of pieces on the sandy beach, with a roar of deathly agony tearing up the heavens.

5 units destroyed.

"What a recoil" Sousuke muttered while reloading the Demolition Gun.

<It is beyond expectations. That kind of attack method was not expected.>

"You should already know that I'm rough. How many years have we been partners?"

<Around 1 year 2 months. Not really that long.>

"Now that you mention it, you're right."

Letting out a snort, Sousuke glanced at the last remaining Behemoth.

The Laevatein was kneeling at the coast in front of the mansion. The last enemy unit was roughly three kilometers beyond the sea, and seemed like it had lost interest in entering into hostilities. It had attempted an intimidating shot, and then retreated at high speed.

<M6 is retreating. It seems he is withdrawing from the battlefield. Shall we make pursuit?>

"Let's try if we can, it's no good at this distance, right?"

The Demolition Gun was similar to the Boxer that had a short gun barrel. It was effective in battle if it was only a few meters away. With that kind of distance there was no accuracy when aiming at the enemy.

<No, it is possible>

"What do you mean?"

<Operating spare arm D>

The control panel blinked. The last equipment mounted on the back. An attachment-like gun barrel was taken in front of the unit and connected into the Demolition Gun. There were gear and locking sounds. The Demolition Gun, being large, was rather short in size. Equipping the gun barrel changed it into a long weapon reminiscent of a tank cannon.

<Switching to ‘Gunhowzer mode’ complete. If it is a high angle ballistic then the maximum range is 20 kilometers>

A long-barreled Howitzer in an Arm Slave? It was an utter amazement to common sense, that was what Sousuke thought.

To begin with, that unit defied all common sense. But as long as he had the functionality of the Lambda Driver he could neglect the recoil and penetrating power. At that level of battle the armor piercing power of the weapon was no big deal. Then, even that ridiculously giant artillery... wouldn’t it be an ideal weapon for the Laevatein?

“Fine. Let’s try it.” Sousuke muttered half-hearted.

<I thought you would say that>

“Shut up.”

Leaning the unit on its knees, he switched the master mode to precise firing. Sensor magnification switched to maximum. The rear form of the Behemoth withdrawing at full speed jolted in the image from the night-vision mode.

There were displays of various kinds of data.

Atmospheric temperature, humidity, wind speed, gun barrel temperature, and others as well. His sniping ability was ordinary at most. And it was impossible to imitate Kurz’s miracles. Al didn’t even have data regarding sniping. He could only rely on his intuition.

In the middle of the screen the target symbol and reticle were the main points. A beep and a small alarm echoed.

<A solid lock. Shall we fire?>

“Not yet” he muttered, controlling the arm in the smallest ratio. Just a little more. That’s right, just a little more....

He fired.

There was a terrible recoil like the one before. There was a great fireball that even exceeded his height; the sand in front of him splashed from the explosion. Even if he steadily braced himself his posture was still pulled down. The Laevatein fell flat on its butt. The impact of the 500 pound bomb immediately exploded in front of him.

Even then, the Lambda Driver of the Laevatein was still functional.

The bomb that was spit out of the muzzle carried the will of Sousuke. It ran perfectly on the expected path, hitting the center of the back of the head of the retreating Behemoth.

In the magnified view screen the head of the giant AS was blown off and fierce flames were scattering.

A little later followed the sound of an explosion.

Together with the muffled echoes, the last Behemoth slowly collapsed, sinking into the sea.

The 6th unit had been destroyed.

After letting out a sigh, Sousuke asked Al.

“...Al”

<Yes, Sergeant>

“How many minutes?”

<5 minutes 52 seconds>

“.....”

There was an awkward silence. After waiting a while Al moderately said.

<Even for being stubborn, with that many opponents, three minutes is expectedly unreasonable>

“Shut up. The 4 minute 12 seconds you said was also impossible.”

<For a human you certainly remember clearly. Are you the type who holds grudges?>

“Exactly, and where did you learn to use that kind of language!?”

<Unfortunately I was abandoned by my pilot for a number of months. I had abundant opportunities to inspect broadcasts and the internet.>

“.....”

<If you wish, I can talk with a non-dignified way of speaking. What do you think of the likes of those low income Southern Americans?>

“Stop it”

Really, rationalizing. The gloominess in his chatter was like always.

“But, well....it’s good that you’re alright” Sousuke said, like complaining, after letting out a sigh.

Those were Sousuke’s true feelings.

Although it was a bit strange, for him, the combat support AI held a sensation like it was a comrade in arms. There was something different and strange about AI compared to the standard equipped AI of the M9. He had already felt that after the battle in Hong Kong. After the reunion just then, that feeling was intensified.

Although Sousuke did not fully understand it, AI answered, <Yes, Sergeant. I too. I am saying that as my true feelings.>

“Hmm.”

Being a machine, it had “true feelings”.

But somehow it didn’t put Sousuke in a bad mood.

Sousuke, standing up in the unit, watched out for the surrounding enemy, changing the sensor to active mode. How were Kurz and the others doing? And also he had to rescue Lemon and the others. With just the remaining infantry, controlling them with the Laevatein was simple.

About pursuing after Kaname... it must have already been impossible...



In the cabin of the Helicopter that continued to fly away, Kaname was prudently thinking about her opportunities.

Leonard's private army, the men in combat uniforms, had already completely loosened up. There were people seeing to Leonard's situation, and those who were looking out the window with caution. Still dirty from the spurt of blood, the haggard-like Kaname was sitting in one corner. Nobody was minding her.

The man beside her leaned forward from the seat. He was talking about something inside the cabin. Although she didn't really understand Spanish much, he seemed to be talking about Leonard's condition.

It has to be now.

At the moment of that thought, a variety of conflicts were running through her.

Will that recklessness be sufficient? Will everything move as she expected? Even though that Kalinin was in the helicopter too? And then about him- the poor Leonard right now, who was suffering like that because of her....?

Foolishness....!

She shook her neck, bit by bit.

Didn't she already feel like that before? The trivial sympathy had become fatal. She understood that much from her current situation.

Closing her tensed eyes, she let out a deep breath.

She fastened up her lips, and then opened her eyes.

At the hips of the soldier that had stood up from the seat, there was an automatic pistol placed in the holster.

Alright, let's do it-

Kaname extended her hand towards the pistol. Quickly extracting it, she rushed from behind the soldier. In an instant, the man reacted slowly to her extended hand, but Kaname barely got away by a fingertip and pointed the muzzle at the opponent.

"Don't move! I'll shoot!?"

It had been a long time since she had let out a loud voice. Pointing at the gathered men in position, she finally shouted.

"Get the pilot immediately! Turn this helicopter back!"

"I understand. Wait."

One of the soldiers muttered something towards the head set.

Before long, the one who came was not the pilot, but Andrei Kalinin. He took in the sight of her holding the pistol taken from one of his subordinates. Even though he was looking at Kaname with the muzzle pointed at his chest, there was no sign of surprise.

"It seems that you're fine. I thought you'd still be in shock after shooting him" Kalinin said. "Miss Chidori. Take your finger off the trigger, and give that gun back slowly. And then let this be over."

"Don't order me. I'll shoot."

"Don't do something unreasonable." Kalinin said calmly.

"People who have no intention to pull the trigger can't hold a gun.

It's a waste of time, and unexpected trouble may occur. I thought you knew about that well enough already."

"Intention to pull the trigger, huh?"

She firmly endured and made a deep breath. Without tears. Without losing. Without anything, exceeding everything, making light of the old veteran. She pulled strength from inside and immediately gazed at the opponents.

"Then are you going to shoot? Even Sousuke?" she asked.

As for the relationship between Sousuke and Kalinin, there was a lot that she did not know. Even at the conversations between the two, there was nothing much to look at.

However, Kaname knew.

When Sousuke said something about "Lt. Commander", with that calm tone of voice, it was with resolute trust. "Mao", "Kurz", "Captain". And even "Your Excellency Class President". It was similar to saying those. No, there was a stronger sense of security that fully reverberated.

That Kalinin turning out to be the enemy of Sousuke... Would he be able to remain calm? Would he be able to affirm to shoot?

Can he preach to me with a face like that?

"I will shoot" Kalinin said without any hesitation. It was an unconcerned reply, or rather, it had a sense of subtle emphasis.

"Actually I already ordered that before. For only that reason, I have one. You, who has a resigned resolution, would not understand...."

"You're lying"

"If you want to think that, then think that. But if you continue in that foolish manner, I will let you feel the extremities of that."

"....."

“The compensation is the life of the man who is in front of your gun. If you plan to shoot then shoot.”

Kalinin’s words tightened into the heart of Kaname one by one.

Really, an amateur girl who had no training managed to snatch the gun by a fluke and had thrust it in front of one of the passengers of the helicopter. And then with an excited voice, demanded to “turn this helicopter back”. In front of this truth, how would the mercenaries in the cabin react, Kaname wondered.

There was no fear in their facial expressions. No vulgar, sneering faces were visible. Not even anger or irritation could be seen. Only expressionless faces looked at her. If it had been before, then it would be like a dispatched place from her imagination. But right then she could vaguely guess what they were thinking.

Probably, they were already thinking like this: Was the gun even loaded? What was the bullet point? They were not worried about their comrade having his gun stupidly snatched away. If Kaname fired, the bullet would pierce through his body. The pierced bullet point would be a stray bullet, and might have the possibility of damaging the important equipment of the helicopter.

That was why there was no meaning in taking a hostage. Their interest was not in their life.

“That’s right. Then how about this.”

Kaname took the muzzle out of the man’s way, and aimed it at the cabin’s ceiling.

Immediately the mercenaries became stiff. Right above the cabin was the engine’s reserved system and hydraulics system, and also the main rotor’s drive system was situated there. Even though it was a military helicopter, the cabin’s interior was mostly not bullet proof. Even if it were a just pistol’s bullet, if it were shot a number of times, serious failures and fires would occur.

“How about this? Would it be fine to shoot like this?”

“I see. Thrust towards something painful.”

Kalinin with a serious face, made a small groan. For a teacher with abundant experience, he had a face like hearing a unique answer from a student.

“But the altitude right now is 300 feet. Speed is 120 miles per hour. If there were serious damage received, the Auto Rotation would have difficulty in making an emergency landing. First, there is no mistake that we would all crash to our death. It would be fortunate if the emergency landing were even to be a success. And then you would be fortunate if you would be the only one uninjured. But chances are we would all manage to get seriously injured, on top of that, the possibility of you getting away is zero.”

It was as he said. Right then Kaname fully understood that. At that altitude and speed, there was no position energy and motion energy in the revolving wings. Not having a seat belt herself, she would be thrown out of the unit at the moment of impact.

“If this is fine with you, then shoot.”

“.....”

Those were not abusive words being hurled toward her. Nor words that bore on her heart. Nevertheless an indescribable feeling of defeat knocked her down. Andrei Kalinin was not a skillful person who could manipulate someone using words. He only spoke the truth. A solemn truth. And right then, the truth that he was speaking of was that even if a single pistol had been snatched, Kaname was really powerless.

All the cleverness and bluffing that had managed to get her out of a pinch before were her modest ideas and daringness. And as such, the conduct of a 17 year old girl's mischief was an opponent that one could easily pass by. Especially for that soldier with a long military service.

Why was the man right in front of her on the side of the enemy? Why didn't he say "Sorry for making you worry. I will take you to Sagara"? At least, even if only she knew, a small wink would be alright. Why was it that he only looked at her with those severely sad eyes?

"You're serious, right?" Kaname asked.

Why was it extremely sad to the point where her eyes became bloodshot?

"Then tell me. Won't I ever meet him again?"

"That's right. You won't meet again." Kalinin said.

She had heard such hopeless predictions before. How much longer would she struggle by herself, crying out with a strong desire, no longer able to meet him?

At least, nobody would be hurt. It was in accordance to what Leonard had gambled upon. She wished to be with Sousuke, but for that freedom, someone surely had to die. That was the circumstance in the helicopter. It was a dilemma that couldn't be helped.

"It's enough already. Return the gun."

"No....."

Kaname, finally, aimed the muzzle at her own temple. She felt the touch of the rough and dull metal. She had the impulse to pull the trigger.

That's right, she wanted to pull it. That would be better. Just about everything was too much. She just had to give a little force to pull the index finger, and everything would disappear. Insecurity and agony, the ill feeling of the sin of shooting Leonard, and even her defeated feeling and desperation.

The bottom of her heart was screaming out "Absolutely not. It's still too early", but she used her superhuman concentration to ignore it.

You can't have hope. You cannot believe in hope right now. You cannot see it. Be devoted to despair. It's not a performance, wish for death from the bottom of your heart.

She had to think like that.

Pulling the trigger would be that simple, without thinking of anything, prostrating-

"Wait" Kalinin requested.

It was the first time that he had raised an impatient tone by a portion. There was a serious anxiety in his facial expression. A gloomy smell of death rose from Kaname. He could delicately smell it. It was because he had seen countless people die that he was capable of feeling it.

"Stop it. We will do what we can."

He believed it.

"Return the helicopter" Kaname said with a dead voice, her eyes absentminded and unfocused.

"That is....difficult in the current situation. Leonard needs medical treatment. If we return then he will be in danger. That is why you need to be calm, get the muzzle off your head. And then aim it towards me."

There were many words coming out. It was the first time he flat-out tried negotiation, discussing. Here came the initiative.

"Then, let me say goodbye"

"Huh?"

"Wireless radio. I want to say goodbye to him.... and then I'll give up...."





The incessant rain that fell in the vicinity finally stopped, and silence controlled the mansion after the battle. It was like the power of the Laevatein had wiped away the rain clouds.

After exterminating all enemy ASes, Sousuke cleaned up the remaining enemy forces.

First he had to rescue Lemon and the others who were in a siege, and chase away the surrounding enemy. There was really no enemy who would resist the Laevatein which had defeated the Behemoths.

Lemon and the elders for the mean time were safe. With the fruits of victory from the Laevatein, they were shaking their hands optimistically. Among them was the woman from the Information Department, Wraith.

Soon after, Kurz, Mao, and Clouseau's M9s came around, cleaning up the remaining enemies and controlling the surrendered enemies. One look from Kurz and the others at the Laevatein and they understood that it was derived from the Arbalest. They were surprised by the wonderful battle of Sousuke and the Laevatein, and postponing the details until "after the withdrawal".

However, once he had the chance Kurz complained.

"At that time, if that guy were at Merida...."

"What about it?"

"Kurz. Stop it." Mao interrupted across the wireless radio.

"There's a lot of things that happened, Sergeant. Well, we'll talk about it later." Clouseau informed him. "Anyway that unit---is that the Laevatein? As much as possible don't let the prisoners of war see it. Disappear with the ECS."

Clouseau's indication was right. That combat power had been seen to their heart's content. That was why, at such a short

distance, there was no sense in letting them see it. They had to avoid letting them analyze its performance.

“Roger.Al, activate ECS. Invisible mode.”

<Impossible> Al said.

“What?”

<It is impossible. At any rate this unit is not equipped with an ECS.>

“What was that? What do you mean?”

<What I mean, I will say this. With extraordinary output for an extraordinary condenser, an overbearing design of a drive system, a large capacity for a cooling system, and then the Lambda Driver, there was no allowance for unnecessary machine parts.>

“.....”

<Informing you of additional references, this unit not only lacks an ECS, it also does not have an ECCS. Radar is at a minimum. Laser Infra-red jamming equipment are also not present. We are extremely vulnerable to missile attacks.>

“Wait a minute. Then isn’t it just like a Savage?”

<No, it is more than a Savage, it is more like an M6.>

“What is this?”

He noticed that the electrical screen display had suddenly become blank. Sousuke was utterly amazed. The optical sensors were the latest model similar to that of the M9, but the other machine parts were not. That crude electronic equipment, how did it managed to survive a modern battle?

<Nonetheless, it is fortunate for the union with Lt. Clouseau. With their cooperation and the data link function, the weaknesses were incrementally improved. Let us drop the mood and do our best, Sergeant.>

“...there is still an ‘unnecessary machine part’”

<What would that be?>

“You. I would rather dismantle you and throw you away as trash, in exchange for an attachment of an ECS.”

<Nonsense. If I were to be removed, this unit would be a dead weight that is like a defective M9.>

“Those impudent comments again. In the first place you-”

<A new wireless signal has been intercepted.> Al informed him, interrupting Sousuke’s jeers.

“Huh?”

<129.22 Mhz. AM wave of the VHS band. An uncoded open line, it has been calling you for a while>

“Me?”

<Affirmative. Shall I connect it to circuit 8?>

“Aah. Connect it.”

<Roger. Complete.>

Feeling something stirring in his chest, Sousuke leaned his ears towards the voice from the digital wireless radio.

It was a woman’s voice.

He knew it well; a really nostalgic voice was calling his name.

“...Sousuke. Can you hear me....?”

The owner of the voice was Kaname.

His heart was beating violently and sweat ran down his back. Just by listening to her voice once again Sousuke’s heart felt like it was being tightly grabbed.

There was no mistake that it was Kaname, but that fragile, frail, and fickle voice... It was not the Kaname that he knew. No- it was the last girl, who was at that school’s quadrangle.

Randomly replying, she was calling out.

“If you don’t hear this....then, can the person hearing this wireless radio tell him? I repeat.Sagara Sousuke. Can you hear me? Right now I am--”

“Chidori-”

Before thinking his fingers moved. Connecting the prescribed circuit, he pushed the communication switch and called her name.

“Chidori”

There was a far away silence and noise. After a short period of time, she answered in Japanese.

“Sousuke? Are you listening?”

“Aah, I’m listening. It’s me. Where are you now? I’m going to pick you up. Tell me your location. No, more than that are you injured? Are you alright?”

“Un... I’m fine”

“I understand. Then tell me your current location. I’m going to pick you up right now. Don’t worry, the enemy has been taken care off. Al is- no, there is also a new unit. I don’t think I will lose anymore. Besides, Mao and Kurz are here. You no longer have to worry. I will definitely---”

“Sousuke. Calm down”

Kaname’s voice was persistently indifferent. But he didn’t mind that, and continued to talk on the head set.

“No, I’m calm. There are many things that I want to talk to you about. Different things. Things that I don’t fully understand. Having hesitated a number of times. But I’m here. But not able to reach you. That’s why, Chidori. Stop talking about this and that, tell me where you are. If you don’t know your current location, then tell me the surrounding terrain. If there are enemy around-”

“Sousuke. Stop” Kaname’s voice interrupted.

“Why? If you don’t know your current location, then I can’t pick you up.”

“It’s not that....”

How difficult. The shallow voice echoed in his ears.

“Stop... coming after me already.”

“What was that? I don’t understand.”

“Don’t come after me. Right now, I’m with Kalinin-san inside the helicopter. With Leonard too. I, think I might have killed him. Poor Leonard..... And then I thought a number of times of getting away, but I understood that it’s useless after all. Those people absolutely won’t let me. Resist only if opposed, somebody might get hurt. That’s why, I’m sorry. Really don’t come after me. About me, I’m really happy that you managed to come this far. But, I guess...”

“Chidori? What are you talking about?”

A long silence. A deafening noise.

He did not understand what she was talking about. Why was she saying “don’t come after me”, he could not understand.

No-

It was not a lie. He really understood.

The dead face of Nami came to his mind. Of course, Kaname did not know about her. It was the symbol of the death of Nami and the others. In Sousuke’s journey to chase after Kaname, the number of deaths had increased. Be it an enemy or an outsider. At least that kind of simplicity, Kaname already understood. At the time of goodbye at the school’s courtyard that was eventually the problem.

Don’t come after me.

After hearing her say that, he already understood.

Struggling by himself, she would suffer. Sousuke had only averted his eyes to that truth.

“That’s why.... Sousuke.....forget about me.”

His eyes were totally black. It was like a feeling of being thrown out into space, a subtle floating sensation which spread out like darkness.

“Wait, Chidori. I...”

“Enough, understand already. We are, already....”

Not knowing what else to do, Sousuke tightened his grip on the stick, sweating, and listened to Kaname grumbling and muttering over the wireless radio. That’s right- it was like being delirious with a fever.

“I don’t want that after all” she said. “I absolutely don’t want that.”

The strength in her voice was returning.

“Sousuke. Are you still listening?”

“Aah.”

“I’m ordering you as the former student body vice president. Alright?”

There was a sound from her nose. She was crying.

“Come and save me. I don’t mind no matter how much is sacrificed. No matter how many died- hundreds, ten thousands, even if a hundred million died I don’t mind. That’s why, come and pick me up! Use everything that you have. That uselessness, mobilize that lack of common sense and annoying technical skill of a soldier, take down no matter what kind of opponent, and embrace me!! You can do this right!? Well!?”

“Aah. I can.” Sousuke strongly replied

Inside of his chest a fierce heat could be felt. That’s right. What was he hesitating for? A hundred thousand people dying. There were many difficulties. If only to take hold of her, exactly, what was he afraid of?

“I will definitely go. Wait for me”

“Uhn...” Kaname said with a short voice. “Sousuke.... I like you very much”

“Me too. I love you.”



Having these words coming out naturally, he himself was also surprised.

“I’m happy.... then, let’s meet properly next time, I will definitely give you a kiss. With all my strength. No matter what the place. Alright? It’s a promise okay?”

“Aah, it’s a promise.”

The noise was getting terrible. The helicopter was getting out of communications range. There was no longer any means of pursuing Kaname.

At least just then.

“No matter how many years, or hundreds of years, I will wait....”

“Don’t worry, I will definitely catch you.”

“Un. Also, search for the refrigerator inside the mansion. There’s a Hard Disk-”

What Kaname was saying was no longer comprehensible. The terrible noise interrupted like a storm, and the circuit line fell silent.



The wireless radio was cut. Kaname took off the headset and removed her index finger from pistol in her hand.

“It’s done.”

She returned the pistol to one of the mercenaries. After listening to her communication, Kalinin, who was the only one who understood Japanese, creased his brow.

“That was a surprise, as may be said” Kalinin said. “I thought that you were really in despair. Seriously thinking about pulling the trigger on your temple.”

“I was serious” Kaname said with a haggard face.

If she had intended to allow herself to be chased after, it would have been seen through by Kalinin's observation. It was not the difference between an act or being serious, it was a psychological warfare inside her.

"Right now, I don't plan on letting you do as you please. I wanted to get away from this place. And then, I really did want to say goodbye to him. But--"

She hung her head in shame.

"That's right. I changed my mind. That's all."

Saying harsh words to Sousuke herself, Kaname understood. Nothing could be done by saying "what can be done". From now on he would be drawn to danger. And there might be many victims. She surely understood that irresponsibility and arrogance.

Even then she wanted to meet him.

Those feelings did not lie. Only those couldn't be helped.

"So you have resigned yourself."

"Yes."

Staring at her, Kalinin said mixed with a sigh, "He is no longer hesitating. Even if I were to stand in front of him, he won't hesitate and pull the trigger. You gave him such an unbelievable power.that's why I didn't want you to use the wireless radio. Giving in to your look of death, it is my defeat."

"How sportsmanlike."

"But about the hard disk that you entrusted to them, I must hear what this is all about."

"Even if I tell you it will be useless" Kaname said, snorting her nose. "Aside from me and Tessa, it's a subject that no one else would understand."



“....Geez”

The M9 landed on the storage deck of the *Tuatha de Danaan*, and Kurz made a sour comment to Sousuke.

“‘Sousuke I like you very much’. ‘Me too, I love you’as it came. You really did it, practically. Why don’t you die already, die with all your strength”

“Not seeing each other for half a year, it was sudden...”
Sousuke muttered with a disheartened face.

The conversation with Kaname... at that time he had forgotten that they were on an open channel. At that moment the Pave Mare transport helicopter had transmitted everything to the *de Danaan*. Mao and Kurz had been locked up in ridiculing him about his conversation with Kaname.

Lemon, being the face of the DGSE, Old Man Courtney and Old Man Seals, and also Wraith, had accompanied them to the *de Danaan*.

Lemon also seemed to have heard the wireless radio. Wanting to meet him after the operation, he looked into the eyes of Sousuke with a face of wanting to say something, a single word, and muttered “with your consent”. Although he didn’t understand Japanese, he managed to roughly guess the flow.

“I’m sorry, Lemon....”

“No. Anyway, can you introduce me to your superiors? We’ve managed to make it this far, we wanted to make certain if the remnants of Mithril are enemies or allies.”

Lemon and the others, who remained in the corner of the storage deck, were restricted to move. Though imperfect, it was the interior of the super latest weapon – a submarine. Although foreign intelligence members were freely walking about, the crew of the *de Danaan* were not strict.

“Aah. I think she’s busy on the bridge, but I think she’ll come immediately.”

His superior.

He hadn’t met with Tessa yet.

“Sagara-san”

He turned his head toward the voice behind and there stood Tessa. She must have left the bridge to Mardukas. She had come to that place faster than he thought.

“Captain....”

“It’s been a long time”

She gave a gentle smile. She was originally slim, but now she looked skinny. Although he hadn’t heard the details yet, it must have been difficult for her after Merida Island had suffered a general attack. Exactly what happened then?

“....yes. Captain also, it’s good that you’re safe.”

“Eeh. A lot of things happened....but, we are alright now. It is also good that Sagara-san is safe.”

It was quite a calm attitude. It was not because she was indifferent, even while thinking of a flood of emotions at the same time, there was no clinginess in her voice. Only the pleasure of one of her many subordinates returning. That was it; that was the only attitude. Was she restraining her emotions in front of everyone, or was that how she really felt? Sousuke was not clear on that.

“Well.... do you want to reinstate yourself?”

“About that....eeh, that is my intention but, there is still a lot to sort. Please let me think for a while.”

“I understand. Let us discuss that again.”

Tessa did not show any appearance of disappointment.

“And then, there are these people who cooperated with me. Michael Lemon from the French Intelligence Department, and Admiral Borda’s friends-”

“Tessa-san!!”

A shout echoed from the storage deck, the two old men rushed towards Tessa. Because they were a little agile, Tessa’s guards were a little delayed in restraining them.

“C..Courtney-san and Seals-san?”

Tessa, who had become stiff from their appearance, like a grizzly in the forest, inquired at Sousuke with her eyes.

“Why, why are these people here?”

The two people were standing there with “We wanted to see you” and “why are you here” or “were you going after me”, the soldiers were desperately pinning them down.

“No, well....they managed to have good connections....”

“I already know that. But why did you bring them along?”

“It would be heartless to leave them, right?”

“You’re right but....”

Completely rethinking, Sousuke continued to introduce Lemon.

“Anyway, this is Lemon. An agent of DGSE who has useful information. He is also smart, and the benefactor of my life, he can be trusted.Lemon. This is my-”

He turned to look at Lemon. He was standing there like an idiot, with his mouth half open, looking at Tessa with his temperature rising.

“.....Lemon?”

“.....”

“Lemon. She is my superior-”

“Eh? What?”

“I told you I would introduce you, didn’t I?”

“Eh, but. But. Really? This girl, you’re introducing me to her?”

“Hey....”

Kurz, Mao and Clouseau, who saw his appearance from behind, whispered “He’s fallen for her” and “how easy to understand” and “another has joined the fan club”.

Then, the ship’s phone called for Tessa. It was an announcement from Mardukas. After a few responses, Tessa turned to all who are present.

“Well then. Although I can’t give you greetings, the ship will be in silent cruise and retreat to safe seas. For the time being, please be quiet. *Tuatha de Danaan* welcomes everyone” she informed them.

Then the AS being carried out of the storage from the Pave Mare, the Laevatein, spoke on its external speakers.

<Speaking of welcoming, does it include me, Miss Testarossa?>

“Of course, Al. It’s also good that you are safe.”

<Thank you, Captain.>

Epilogue

Gavin Hunter, who had regained consciousness in the medical room inside the hospital, immediately noticed a girl sitting beside him.

She had short hair and was wearing a baseball cap low on her eyes. She was wearing jeans and a trainer. Her age was around 16 or 17 years old.

“Miller huh....”

Her smile was unfriendly, at most her lips were not stiff.

“Don’t push yourself” she gently said. “Just a while ago, there was a communication from Wraith. That kid was safely delivered into his hands. And displayed powers which were beyond expectations.”

“Is that so....”

Nothing but a coarse voice came out. Lightly getting up, he looked around the medical room. Immediately next to him was the electro-cardiogram monitor. It was making a systematic electronic sound.

“....that’s good. I didn’t think that we would actually complete it. We made it. Thank you. It was because of you.”

“No. It’s a debt to that person, Sagara-san, for helping me. If he didn’t arrive, I still might be somewhere in Siberia in a state of trance.”

“Well, that’s true.”

“But, I only helped. In the end it was because that kid, Al himself. He designed his own body, an ordinary AI would not be capable of that. That person called Bani sure was incredible.”

“I see. The ‘strongest AS’ huh?” Hunter muttered, looking absent mindedly at the ceiling.



The personality and creativity of that artificial intelligence wouldn't fail in the construction of its own body. It could not give birth to its creativity or compatibility by simply being connected to a network. Standing on the ground, feeling the heat and wind, exposing itself to the utmost limits of combat, those things were important. That was why that AS was put into the most advanced artificial human body.

From what he'd heard the experimental ARX-5 had not been an AS. The ARX series at that point had been manufactured in a research room and assembled with special materials. They had never heard of a supernatural phenomenon occurring while measuring with a high precision device.

Dramatic variation was only seen starting from the ARX-6. It had had the first pseudo human body. It had been loaded into a remodeled M6, and that system had functioned squarely.

Then towards 7. Next towards 8. With fierce vigor the completion advanced.

That strange gravitational field generation ability, that itself was already important for the military. Thinking of the genealogy of the ARX series, was there a connecting element there?

"That's right. The late Whispered, Bani Morauta, did he notice anything?"

"I don't know about that."

Having asked this question of another Whispered, Miller's dark face nodded.

"Being able to help build the ARX-8, I gradually understood. Could it be that, what Bani was aiming for was...."

She cut her words. Hunter waited patiently for a reply, but she did not say anything after that.

Having arranged for the rehabilitation, he took notice of the burden on her mind, and he changed the topic.

“It seems that you were attending on me”

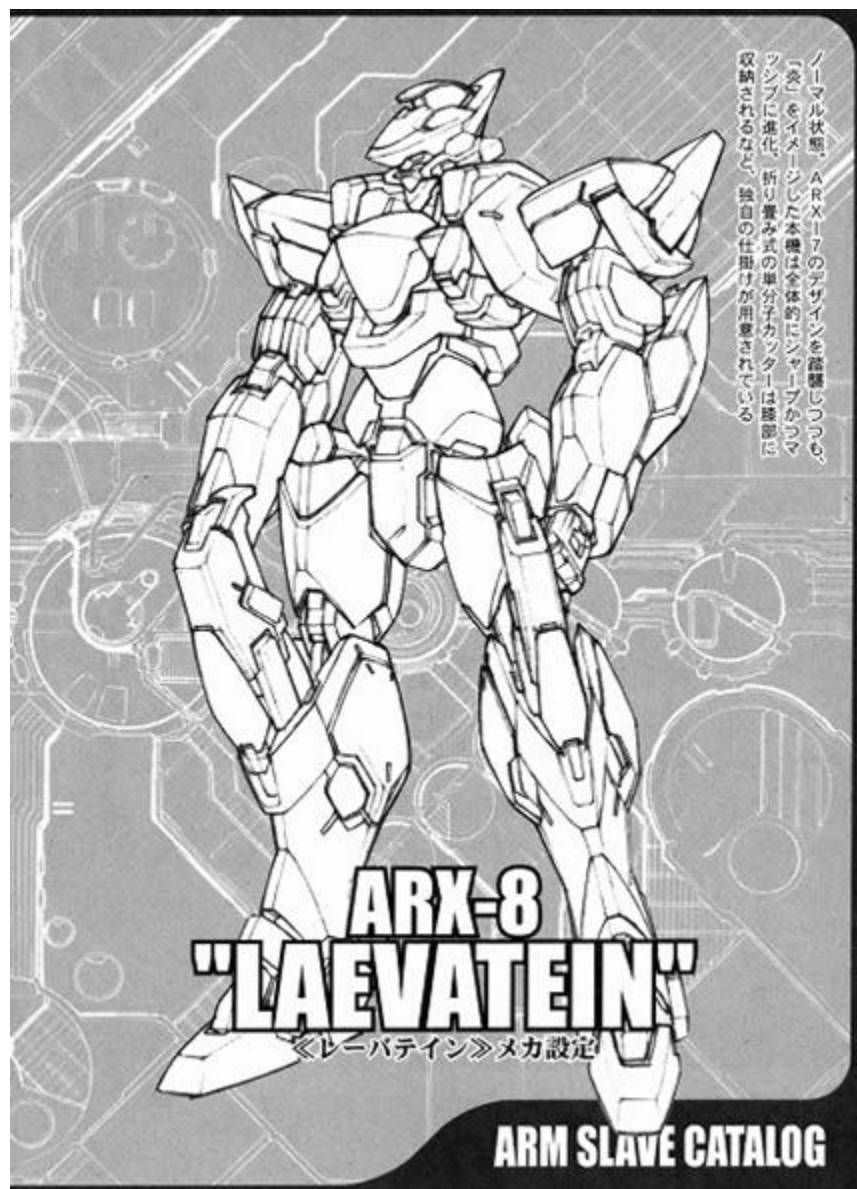
“Eeh. It’s because I was worried.”

“I’m alright, Miller. Why don’t you go to a safer place?”

“Yes. If just for a little while, I’ll do that.”

She lightly stroke Hunter’s worn out face, and made a small smile.

The End



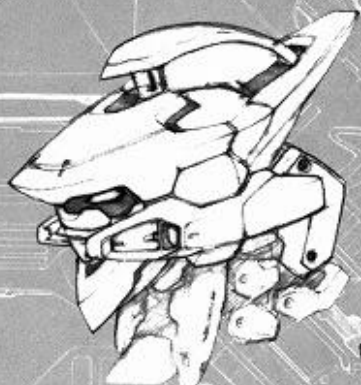
Text 1: Normal mode. Having similar design to ARX-7, it has a sharp and massive evolution with its [fiery] image in its entire body. The folded state of the monomolecular cutter is stored in its knee block, prepared device for its use.

Text 2: Laevatein Mecha diagram

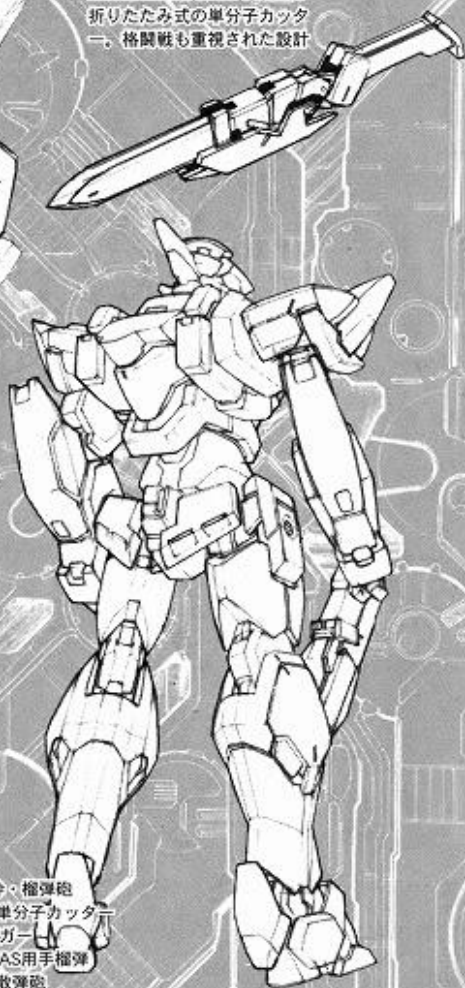
ARX-8 LAEVATEIN

GRAW-4 MONOMOLECULAR CUTTER

折りたたみ式の単分子カッター。
格闘戦も重視された設計



各種センサー、対人武装などが
集約された頭部。アーバレスト
より一層スバルタンなイメージ
をあたえる



【スペック】

- ▼全高：8.7m
- ▼基本重量：10.3t
- ▼動力源：パラジウムリアクター/
ロス&ハンブルトン PRX3000
- ▼最大作戦行動時間：30時間
- ▼最高自走速度：不明
- ▼最高跳躍高：不明
- ▼固定武装：
GAU 19/S 12.7mmガトリングガン×2
XM18 ワイヤーガン×2
- ▼基本携帯火器：
セワード・アーセナル 165mm多目的破砕・榴弾砲
ジオトロン・エレクトロニクス GRAW-4単分子カッター
ロイヤル・オードナンス M1108対戦車ダガー
アライアント・テックシステムズ M1097AS用手榴弾
オットー・メラ「ボクサー2」76mm散弾砲
他

Text 1: GRAW-4 MONOMOLECULAR CUTTER. Folded state of the monomolecular cutter. Design considered for melee.

Text 2: Variable sensor. Collected in the head block for anti infantry weapons, having a much more Spartan Image than the Arbalest.

[Specs]

***Total Height : 8.7m**

***Total Weight : 10.3t**

***Generation : Palladium Reactor / Ross & Humbleton PRX3000**

***Maximum Combat operating hours : 30 hours**

***Maximum Propulsion Speed : Unknown**

***Maximum Jump Altitude : Unknown**

***Fixed Armament :**

GAU-19/S 12.7mm Gattling Gun X2

XM18 Wire Gun X2

***Original Carried Weapon :**

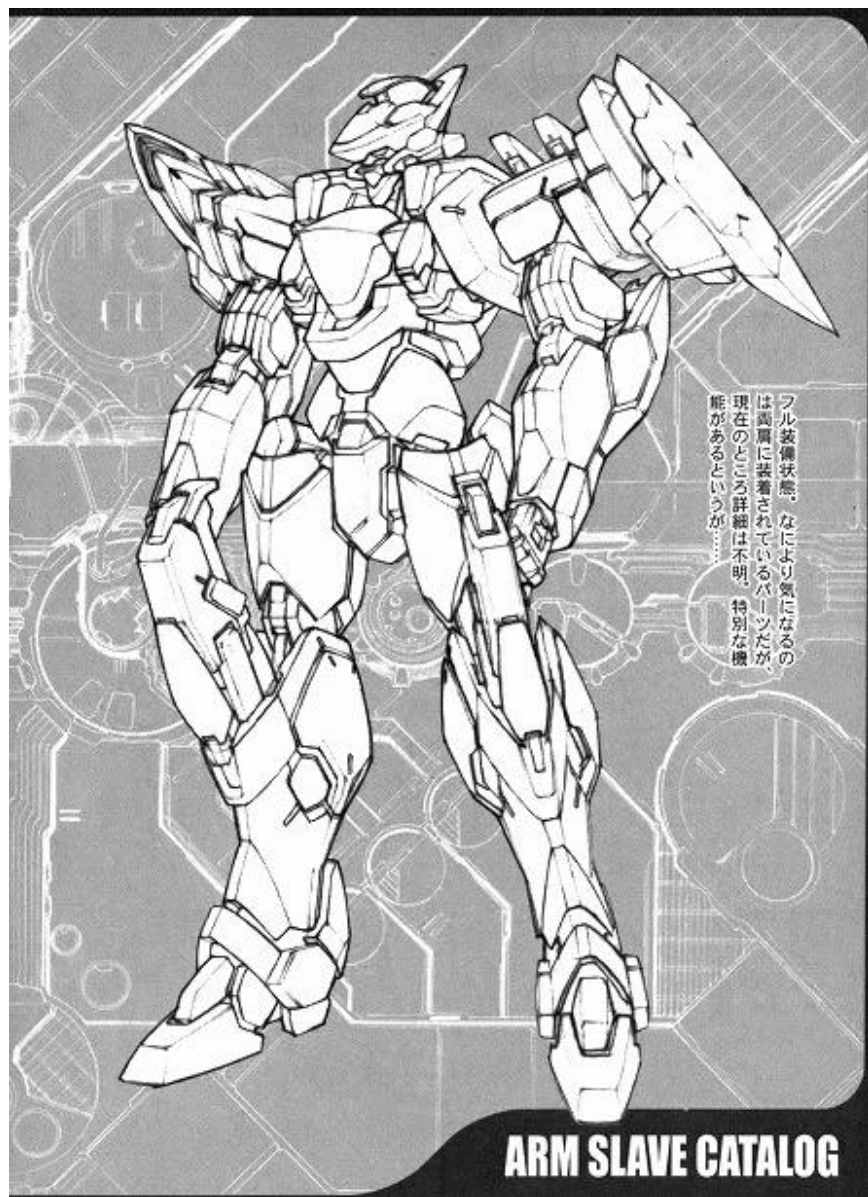
Seward Arsenal 165mm Multi-purpose Demotion Howitzer

Geotron Electronic GRAW-4 Monomolecular cutter

Royal Ordnance M1108 Anti Tank Dagger

Alliant Tech Systems M1097 AS use Hand Grenade

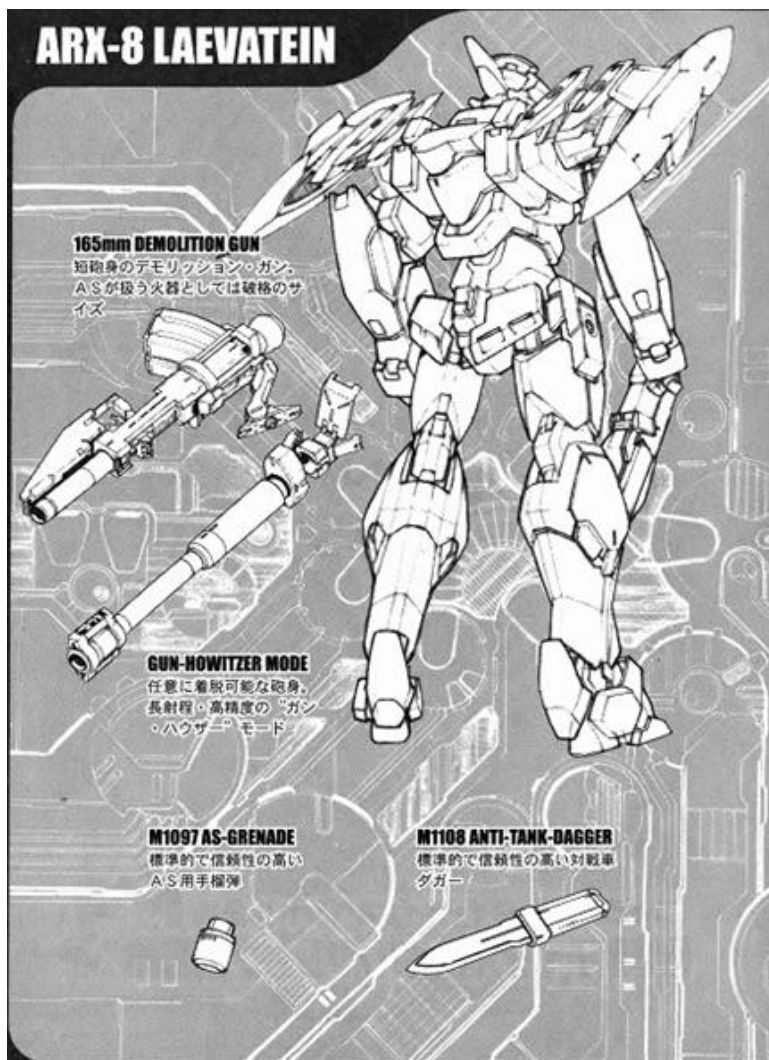
Oto Melara [Boxer-2] 76mm Shot Cannon



フル装備状態。なにより気になるのは
右肩に装着されているパーツだが、
現在のところ詳細は不明。特別な機
能があるというが……

ARM SLAVE CATALOG

Full Equipment State. There are parts equipped in the shoulder, but currently details are unknown. Perhaps it has a special ability....



Text 1: 165mm DEMOLITION GUN

A short barreled Demolition Gun. A special size for AS use.

Text 2: GUN-HOWITZER MODE

An optional gun barrel attachment. Long range, high altitude "Gun Howzer" Mode

Text 3: M1097 AS-GRENADE

A highly trusted standard level AS Hand Grenade

Text 4: M1108 ANTI-TANK-DAGGER

A highly trusted standard level Anti Tank Dagger

第1話

普段の知的な姿からは想像できない、放心状態のテッサ。彼女の身に、一体なにが起ったのか？

『つどろメイク・マイ・デイ』スペシャル企画
四季童子イラスト・コレクション

Chapter 1: It is unimaginable to have an appearance of ordinary intelligence, an absentminded Tessa, in that body of hers, what exactly is happening?



Chapter 2: Tessa looking up with fearsome eyes. Behind her, draws Clouseau and M9 displaying the wellness of the de Danaan squadron



Chapter 3: The injured body being wrapped in bandage, the eyes of Sousuke being full of fighting spirit, Codename Uruz 7 - has come back!!



Chapter 5: Drawing the impression of Sousuke and Kaname moving, their feelings though apart are surprising. Even in suffering, even in not finding the exit, they run!!



第6話

男性キアラばかりの混戦1枚、
人種や国籍、年齢は違えども、
戦う男たちは絵になる。老兵
は死なず、戦い続ける

Chapter 6: Male characters with coolness. Different in Race, Nationality and Age, the fighting men are drawn together, undying old soldier, the fight continues.



Chapter 7: Sousuke inside the cockpit of the M6. Expressing the tension before landing. Heading to where Kaname was taken, Mission Start!!



第8話

クルツ、宗介、そしてマオ。
かつての仲間が*あいまみえる*。
トリオ復活!! *狼たちの逆襲*
がはじまる——

Chapter 8: Kurz, Sousuke and Mao. The comrades finally meet. Trio revives!! The cruel counterattack begins-

第9話

かなめの構えた銃は、まっす
ぐにレナードへ向けられた。
トリガーは引かれるのか？
息づまる劇的なシーン



Chapter 9: The pistol that Kaname took hold of, points it immediately at Leonard. Will she pull the trigger? A breath taking scene



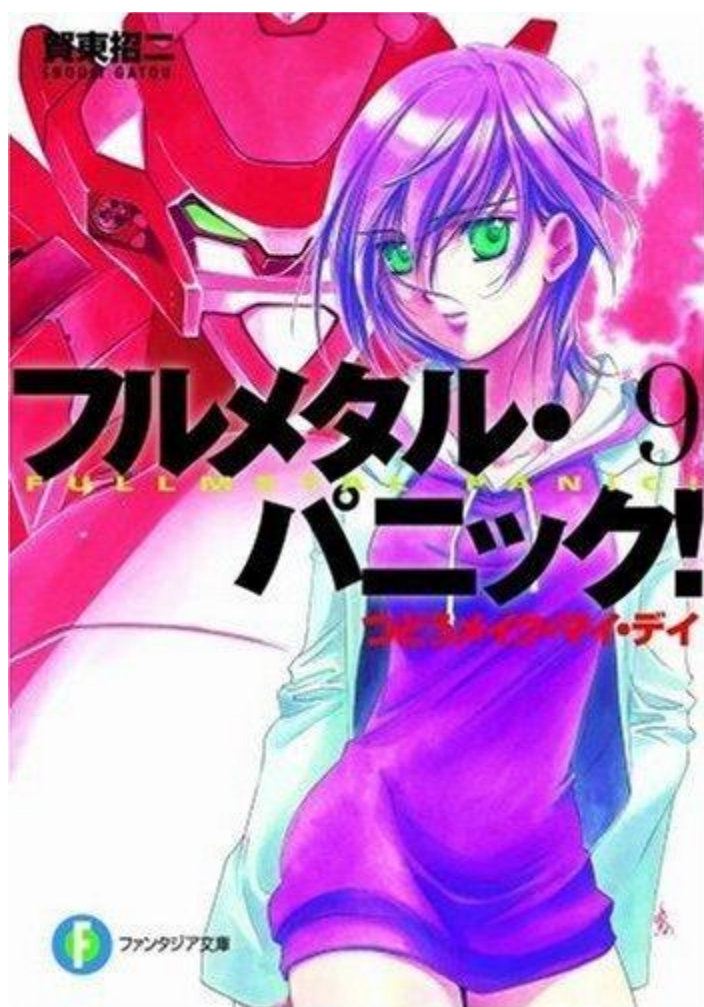
Chapter 10: Finally the new AS appears. ARX-8 Laevatein and Sousuke, cutting down the strong enemy, to save Kaname!!

第11話

宗介とかなめ 不器用なばかりに想いを告げられないふたりは、もう一度その手を触れあえるだろうか？



Chapter 11: Sousuke and Kaname - clumsily confessing their feelings, will their hands be able to touch again?



Translator's Afterword:

Notes on *Approaching Nick of Time*:

At first I had decided not to translated NOT seeing that HunterSeeker from Animesuki had already graciously provided the detailed summary (which is almost like a complete translation), which the links can be found on the following:

Prologue and Chapter 1:

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=1456141&postcount=3030>

Chapter 2:

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=1553456&postcount=3114>

Chapter 3:

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=1623301&postcount=3166>

Chapter 4:

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=1698156&postcount=3320>

Chapter 4 continued:

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=1733864&postcount=3351>

Chapter 5:

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=1739586&postcount=3361>

Chapter 5 continued and Epilogue:

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=1773754&postcount=3392>

However, since HunterSeeker also suggested that I continue with NOT, I will do so just for the sake of completion and continuity. Not to mention that I only recently acquired NOT. However, I don't think I would be able to finish NOT that quickly seeing how I still have other matters to attend to. In any case, if you really want to know what happens in NOT, the links above are provided for your convenience. Also don't forget to thank HunterSeeker for the great service he's been doing for the community.